



**Acceptance Remarks**  
**David D. Cooke Social Impact Award**  
**Episcopal Community Services Chefs Gala**  
**May 9, 2026**  
**Michael G. Pappas, M.Div.**  
**Executive Director**  
**San Francisco Interfaith Council**

*I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; thirsty and you gave me something to drink; a stranger and you invited me in; in need of clothes and you clothed me; sick and you looked after me; in prison and you came to visit me.*

*Lord, when did we see you in these ways and respond...*

*I tell you, when you reached out and cared for the least of these my children you ministered unto me.*

To recognize the presence of God in the faces of those in the greatest of need, and to respond, is what has brought us together, here, tonight, fellow laborers in the vineyard of good.

Dearest and beloved Madam Speaker Emerita, I am blessed to receive the David D. Cooke Social Impact Award, and doubly blessed to have you present it. Your 40 years of selfless and visionary public service is the embodiment of faith in action, the prayer of St. Francis and San Francisco values.

Thank you Episcopal Community Services Executive Director Beth Stokes and your remarkable team, our faithful partners in the struggle.

Thank you ECS Board Chair and dear brother Bishop Austin Rios and the ECS Board of Directors, along with the David D. Cooke family for your generosity in bestowing this award.

Most of all I give these thanks to God, to those with whom I share this journey of service and to those blessed souls who allow us to serve them.

No award could be more meaningful than this because of its particular emphasis on our collective duty to respond to the needs of the homeless,

I must confess, preparations to accept this award forced me to revisit challenging personal memories of a life-changing moment of conversion that gave me the strength of conviction to leave a lucrative career in politics and investment banking to answer God's call to ministry and service. Unlike that of St. Paul on the road to Damascus, mine happened late at night in the chill of a New York City subway, almost four decades ago. where I was physically accosted by a struggling and not-in-right-mind homeless person, one of the countless then wandering the streets of the cities across our nation that President Ronald Regan said would be fine as long as they took their medications. The problem was, this particular forgotten soul had no place to call home but that subway platform. A societal failure. I knew that he didn't know where he was and, if the truth be told, at that moment in life, metaphorically speaking, neither did I. That encounter stirred my soul, forced me to wrestle with my conscience, make life-changing decisions and set me on a never-imagined path to try to make good for that sibling we let fall through the cracks.

Unbeknownst to me, at that same time, in that same year, a serious homeless crisis was emerging on the other side of the country, here in this City of St. Francis. Here, religious leaders were challenged by sitting Mayor Art Agnos to rise to the occasion and be part of the solution. That crisis gave birth to the Interfaith Winter Shelter and, a year later, in the aftermath of the Loma Prieta earthquake, the San Francisco Interfaith Council, which almost two decades later I would be chosen to lead and for almost two decades I have been privileged to serve.

That shelter, a gift to our City, is a labor of love that the San Francisco Interfaith Council shares with Episcopal Community Services. Together with the the congregations that host, prepare and serve meals, we lovingly feed, give respite, dignity and hope to as many as 80 of our unhoused siblings each night in the coldest and most inclement months of the year. There, in service to our most vulnerable siblings, we are given pause to recognize the image and likeness of God in the faces of those that hunger and are in need of shelter and love.

No one person deserves credit for the herculean efforts it takes to do the work we do. I stand on the shoulders of a giant in the person of Rita Semel, the matriarch of interfaith in San Francisco, whose vision, tireless and loving efforts birthed both the Interfaith Winter Shelter and the San Francisco Interfaith Council. As well, I share this award with two unsung heroes, whose behind the scenes diligence and attention to detail make the SFIC's role in the Interfaith Winter Shelter appear effortless, SFIC staff Cynthia Zamboukos, succeeded by Sharon Demko.

To the Cooke family, after whose beloved David, of blessed memory, this award is worthily named, I am told that the greatest honor that could be given to the memory of one who has so selflessly given of themselves is to build upon that legacy by prayerfully emulating their example. In expressing deep thanks for this award, I pray that continued humble service will make me worthy of it.

Thank you, and God bless you all.