

A Local Official's Guide to Working with Clergy and Congregations

-verb (used without object),
-rate·ed, -rating.
col·lab·o·rate

1) To work together, especially
in a joint intellectual effort.

2) To cooperate with another
group or person to work as a team
to achieve a common goal.



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Purpose of the Guide

Clergy and congregations are a part of the full “fabric of community” in California cities and counties.



Clergy and congregations are a part of the full “fabric of community” in California cities and counties. As local officials consider how to promote more widespread public engagement in their communities, one option is to increase working relationships between local governments and congregations.

The benefits of such relationships include:

- Increasing the level of information the public has about local agency¹ activities,
- Deepening and diversifying public engagement activities, and
- Generating partnerships to support local programs and services.

A Local Official’s Guide to Working with Clergy and Congregations shares ideas for enhancing relationships with local clergy and congregations in ways that are mindful of the necessary boundaries between public sector and religion sector institutions. The guide includes stories of how local officials have approached this work and offers practical recommendations for making these partnerships successful. Please also note the glossary of religion sector language on page 5 and important points of law relating to public entities and religion on page 7.

This guide was funded by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. While the ideas and recommendations apply throughout California and beyond, many examples and organizational resources are drawn from the Foundation’s service area.

Why Work with Clergy and Congregations?

Clergy and congregations represent an important reservoir of “social capital” in communities throughout California. Local officials should provide clergy with the opportunity to interact side-by-side with civic and political leadership, and make them aware of avenues through which they and their congregants can participate in the public life of their communities.

— Mayor,
City in the Inland Empire



There are many practical reasons for counties and cities to develop working relationships with local clergy and congregations. These reasons include the following:

Diverse Membership

An Institute for Local Government survey² suggests that local officials are very concerned about how to attract a more diverse set of participants into public engagement activities. They wish to involve a larger number of residents, adding to those who typically get involved or who tend to focus on single issues alone. Working with clergy and congregations can be a strategy for reaching out “beyond the usuals” to include additional voices from the community.

Congregations contain not only a diversity of religious denominations, but also additional diversities of race, ethnicity, culture, age and nationality; all representative of their local communities. In many communities, a significant number of residents are members of local congregations; working with such organizations can enable local agencies to connect with a broader cross sections of the community.

Readiness to Participate

Community service is an important component of many congregations. For example, in the San Francisco peninsula area, a survey found significant interest in public engagement by the clergy.³ Additionally, clergy and congregation members typically welcome an invitation to become better informed about local government and more engaged in local agency activities.

The goal is to develop authentic, long-term relationships. Such relationships are especially helpful when they support broader community-wide issues such as disaster preparedness and response, school drop-out prevention, health and wellness, land use planning, and environmental and climate change strategies.

Resources

Organizationally, congregations also represent collective resources: of people and of facilities. Local agencies can draw on these resources, in partnership with the religion sector, to extend the reach and resources of the public sector in the delivery of programs and services. Working with congregations to disseminate disaster preparedness information and to develop post-disaster neighborhood response centers and emergency shelters offers just one such example.

Clergy themselves can be resources — not only within their congregations but in the community as well. These are individuals who typically:

- Have leadership skills
- Help shape community opinions
- Serve as institutional and community gatekeepers
- Are knowledgeable about many neighborhood and local issues
- Can support congregant engagement in the community, and
- Can serve as potential “legitimizers” of public action.

Clergy typically serve as a kind of community trustee, usually with broader rather than narrow single interests. They can be effective advocates and facilitators for community partnerships.

Working with local clergy and congregations offer opportunities for direct access and relationships with the broadest range of congregants. This can be a different experience for local agencies than working with other religion sector groups (see “Glossary of Religion Sector Language” on page 5).



Glossary of Religion Sector Language

Religion Sector: The religion sector contains those institutions composing the framework for the people and organizations associated with collective religious activities. Some consider the religion sector, or certain religion sector organizations, to be a part of the broader civic or nonprofit sector.

Congregations: Congregations are the primary institution of the religion sector. Congregations are the membership and the gathering points for various religious denominations. In most but not all cases, congregations are led by clergy. In some instances, a board of congregants shares in leadership responsibilities.

In addition to their respective denominational beliefs, congregations share: 1) the experience of collective worship; 2) common meeting space and building(s); 3) frequent and regular gatherings for education, social support and fellowship; and more. Another significant aspect of congregations is their location in neighborhoods throughout the community

Clergy: In most cases, individual congregations are led by one or more clergy who combine the role of spiritual leader, chief management and organization professional, and denominational representative. “Clergy” is a generally appropriate and inclusive word that designates religion sector leadership. However, it is important to emphasize that not all denominations “ordain” or otherwise designate clergy of any title.

Denominational Institutions: Denominational institutions, sometimes referred to as judicatories, take many forms and range from the formal to the informal. Their role and impact locally can vary depending on their respective structures and hierarchies, their staffing levels, and/or the nature of their communication and interactions with their local congregations.

Denominational institutions can provide local officials with information about denominational structure and appropriate clergy contacts in the local area, an understanding of denominational practices, and ways to disseminate information to denominational clergy and congregations. Even if a denomination has little formal organization in an area, information may be gained from a “lead” clergy identified by their seniority or interest.

Interfaith Collaboratives: Interfaith collaboratives frequently result from the collective efforts of a number of clergy and congregations to support a community activity or service, or to advocate for a local, state or national issue. For instance, a collaborative may be the result of a desire to host a homeless shelter, promote community re-entry, or advance immigration reform. However, they may also exist for the primary purpose of promoting multi-faith relationships and understanding.

The scope of these collaboratives may be local, regional, state or national. Governance structure often involve representatives of participating congregations. In some cases, they may evolve to become separate entities with largely independent governing boards.

Faith-Based Organizations: Faith-based organizations provide specific or a range of social services, although their mission may be strongly influenced by the religious beliefs of its founding and/or coordinating bodies. The organization may be related to a congregation or denominational institution, an interfaith collaborative, or a community-based organization. They also can be local affiliates of a larger group. Some are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations; most have a board of directors and are managed by an executive director and professional staff. Faith-based organizations have been the historic points of interaction for government and other nonprofits with the religion sector.

Local Clergy Associations: Local clergy associations are typically *ad hoc* groups of clergy within one or more cities or across a county. Their purposes may include collegiality, communications, and the achievement of other common interests. In some instances there may be more than one association in the same area with different memberships based on denominations, an orientation to community needs, or culture. These associations may also be known by other names, such as ministerial associations or alliances, or clergy caucuses.

Regional Clergy Networks: Regional clergy networks are professional and capacity-building associations of all clergy (representing all denominations and congregations) organized in specific geographic areas. A regional clergy network has formal organizational structure. Such networks promote the greatest breadth of clergy involvement with political, civic and business leaders.

Working with Clergy and Congregations: Three Important Categories

“The faith community works with our local government in several important ways. They are active partners in delivering services to the most vulnerable. They bring a strong, clear voice to public discourse on matters involving justice, compassion, and equal opportunity. They gather the stories of the unheard and help spread the word about available services. Our community is better served because of their engagement.”

— Supervisor,
S.F. Bay Area County

Working with clergy and congregations can take many forms. Interviews with local officials suggest three particularly important categories for cities and counties. This is not an exhaustive list as, for instance, some congregations may be engaged in advocacy efforts that are beyond the scope of this short guide.

1 Extending Local Agency Education and Outreach

Congregant meetings and media, as well as direct information sharing by clergy, can help local agencies “spread the word” about available public services, emergency preparedness planning, opportunities for involvement in local commissions or citizen academies, public engagement opportunities, and more.

Many congregations have both print and electronic options for outreach through monthly newsletters, weekly worship bulletins, emails, and websites. Other possibilities include announcements from the pulpit, as well as congregant meetings organized around different age groups or, in some cases, nationality or ethnicity of members. Local officials may request, through clergy or staff, that public sector news and notices of interest to congregants be disseminated as appropriate.

As time and resources allow, direct presentations to specific groups of congregants can be a very effective and targeted form of outreach. For instance, an effort to provide emergency preparedness information to non-English speakers might include a focus on congregations with these populations, perhaps with translated notices made available at appropriate services or meetings. Or, recruitment for more diverse membership on a city or county commission could include presentations to a number of groups within the same congregation.

Members of the clergy, speaking formally or informally with their congregants, can be an invaluable means of reaching community residents. For instance, clergy may be willing to announce “back to school” nights, a health fair, or a local agency’s plans for food collection or distribution.

2 Deepening and Diversifying Public Engagement

Local officials know the difficulty of reaching out and successfully engaging those residents who rarely get involved in conversations about local planning, budgeting, environmental, and traffic issues, to name just a few topics. Often a relatively small number of individuals show up to council or board meetings

and attend public hearings and other public engagement events.

Cities and counties can also find it challenging to involve immigrants and members of low socio-economic status communities in local decision-making. Other residents — whatever their demographic profiles — may have little knowledge of local government and rarely participate in local civic and political life.

There is no single strategy to change these dynamics, as they are based on multiple and complex real life conditions, needs and issues. However, reaching out to clergy and congregations is one tool to bring under-represented populations into public engagement efforts.

A good first step is to develop an outreach strategy for public involvement efforts that includes a clergy and congregational component.





3 Partnering in the Delivery of Programs and Services

Collaborative and multi-sector approaches are increasingly recognized as effective strategies to address community needs. This suggests the possibility for imaginative partnerships between local agencies and businesses, community-based organizations — and also clergy and congregations.

For instance, if the goal is to attract under-represented populations (such as renters, ethnic or immigrant residents, youth, or others) into a general plan update process, identify those congregations that include members of these groups. Similarly, if you are planning a citizen or leadership academy to better inform and involve residents, a recruitment message to all or to targeted clergy and congregations can help reach your participation goals.

In some areas, a clergy association or interfaith collaborative may be a bridge to a large number of local clergy and congregations. However, be aware that these groups may represent only a limited number, or a certain representation, of local clergy and congregations.

The points made above, in the “Extending Education and Outreach” section, are applicable here as well. However, working with clergy and congregations to support public engagement can extend well beyond communication alone.

Congregations may offer a ready audience of residents who are used to coming together and have a known and supportive place in which they can comfortably meet. As appropriate, such a customary gathering places in a community can be sites for community conversations and other public forums.

Local officials will not be able to meet with every congregation, to solicit public ideas and recommendations. However, engaging residents through clergy and congregations is an important element of a well-rounded public engagement strategy.

With local agencies facing diminished revenues and staff resources, developing partnerships can be a timely and cost-saving measure. The human resources and facilities available through clergy and congregations — and the trust and legitimacy congregations may bring to partnerships with local agencies — can be uniquely important attributes of program and service delivery.

Congregations can also be sources of individuals to volunteer for a range of local agency-related roles, from museum docents to city hall greeters. However, more formal

ongoing relationships between local agencies and clergy and congregations have even more to offer. Some examples include:

- Emergency preparedness and response, including using congregational facilities as sites for emergency shelters, food distribution and medical centers after a disaster.
- Social services, such as contracts for congregations to operate day labor centers, support services for prisoner reentry programs, or tutoring and mentoring in low-income communities.

Collaborations benefit from clear roles relating to work responsibilities and decision-making, as does a healthy respect for the need to maintain a boundary between public agencies and religion. Partnerships should also be assessed for effectiveness on a regular basis. Within appropriately established parameters, the advantages of such partnerships to residents in need, to local agencies, to congregations, and to a more participatory community culture, can be significant.

Law Relating to Public Entities and Religion

The federal Constitution contains a basic prohibition against public agency entanglement with religion.⁴ California’s Constitution contains similar prohibitions,⁵ but goes on to forbid specifically any governmental support for religious purposes⁶ and the use of public money for religious schools.⁷ The notion is that there is supposed to be a certain separation between religion and public agencies.⁸

Public agencies maintain this separation when their activities:

1. Have a valid state secular purpose;
2. Have a principal or primary effect that neither discriminates against nor inhibits religion; and
3. Do not produce excessive public agency entanglement with religion.⁹

Public agencies must of course accommodate the free exercise of religion; a key is for public agencies to avoid actions that a) require residents or public agency employees to support or participate in religious activities or b) put the public agency in the position of appearing to endorse particular religious faiths.¹⁰

The context in which such issues are likely to arise is when an agency considers partnerships with clergy and congregations to deliver services or provide access to facilities. Close consultation with the agency’s attorney should occur when contemplating such partnerships to make sure that no missteps occur.

Elements of Effective Working Relationships with Clergy and Congregations

1 Develop and Maintain a Database of Clergy and Congregations in Your Community

Developing and maintaining an up-to-date database of all local clergy helps local officials forge relationships with the broadest possible range of local clergy and congregations. Elected officials and staff may already be familiar with some congregations--perhaps due to personal relationships, the congregations they attend, or due to certain clergy's more active participation in the community's civic and political life.

When compiling such a list, keep these points in mind:

- An existing list of clergy from another source may not be complete (if gathered from a newspaper or provided by local clergy association, for instance).
- A clergy group in the community may have organized around a particular issue, or may have historically represented only one part of the local clergy community.
- Many congregations are not found on mainstream media lists; smaller congregations, including those with substantial ethnic minority and/or immigrant congregants, may not be listed.

Such databases should include accurate congregational names and clergy titles. They should also include clergy and congregations that are sponsored or hosted within a larger congregation or are satellite congregations.

The responsibility and process for compiling, organizing and updating the data base should be clear from the beginning. For instance, determine what information should be included, how it is going to be organized, and who will be responsible for its development and maintenance. Also clarify ownership of the list (if compiled with others) and determine who will have access to it.



2 Establish and Maintain Relationships with Local Clergy

The development of relationships with clergy, and knowing how to communicate respectfully with them, is singularly important to working effectively with local congregations.

This relationship between local agencies and local clergy and congregations should be also be understood as a two-way street. The relationship should benefit all involved. Not only is this respectful of the role of clergy and the congregation in the community, such relationships offer both clergy and congregations a greater understanding of local government and access to local community leaders on matters of common interest.


Ideally, activities to develop relationships should be both formal and informal. These might include hosting an annual clergy breakfast or a gathering of clergy (convened by a senior local official) in city or county offices, regular written or electronic communication to the clergy database, attending meetings of local clergy groups, individual meetings with clergy, attending worship services and festivals at individual congregations, and other such regularly scheduled contacts.

In some cases, local officials may want to meet regularly with groups of clergy to discuss a specific issue or a number of issues over time. These can be opportunities for mutual education and joint planning and problem solving. Share the agenda setting process with participating clergy, have good facilitation, and make certain that meeting purposes are clear to all. Consider a regular schedule of meetings with a range of formats, and with time for clergy and local officials to get to know one another.

Inviting all local clergy will help avoid perceptions that these meetings “belong” to only one group or segment of congregations. Whatever the form or format of the meetings might be, establishing ongoing relationships with the largest number of local clergy is essential and should take place, whenever possible, prior to initiating joint efforts.

An effective clergy network, once developed, will support ongoing communications and broad working relationships between clergy and local agencies.

A commitment to a continuity of relationships with clergy enables an agency to increase the number and type of relationships with clergy and, as



official to members of the clergy is a sign of respect and professional courtesy.

Elected officials play an important role in affirming the value of relationships with clergy and congregations. Local agency staff typically develop and maintain the clergy database, ensure ongoing communications, prepare joint meetings or programs with local officials and clergy, and foster clergy or congregation involvement in local engagement or service delivery activities. Providing staff with the information and opportunities to broaden their expertise in this area can be helpful.

appropriate, with congregational leaders as well. It will also demonstrate the agency's investment in local agency-clergy relationships, even among those clergy who may not yet be involved.

As with any sector of the community, certain clergy and congregations will be more involved and known to local officials. Others will be less so. The focused efforts of local elected officials and staff to reach beyond those already involved will greatly expand the possibility of effective partnerships with a greater breadth of congregations.

When initiating or developing relationships with clergy, a personally addressed communication from a local

when referring to a particular church, synagogue, mosque, temple, and so on.

“Clergy” is a generally denotes religion sector leadership, although not all denominations “ordain” or otherwise designate clergy of any title. For example, a Christian Science congregation selected their Second Reader as a representative in clergy gatherings. Congregations may have designations such as pastor, minister, brother/sister, or deacon, but not everyone who fills these roles is necessarily ordained “clergy”.

Using accurate language for clergy titles such as rabbi, father, reverend, imam, and bishop is important; some clergy may use two titles, often depending on the formality of the situation. Knowing the names and dates of a denomination's holy days and sacred texts is also important.

The term, “*religious traditions*” refers to the historic contributions of religious leaders, texts and institutions to the formation of society's values, law, and history. If a reference is made to a particular text, then the specific source or sources should be identified, such as the Jewish Tanakh,¹¹ Christian Bible, Islamic Qur'an, etc.

3 Understand Religion Sector Language and Traditions

A public agency's speech should reflect an understanding of the infrastructure of the religion sector, as well as a respect for the diversity of religious faiths. (See *Glossary of Religion Sector Language*, page 5.)

The term “*congregation*” is an inclusive term for most faiths and reinforces the central and membership role of congregants. Use specific denominational language



The changing practices of congregations, such as the inclusion of women as clergy in some denominations, may create uncertainty about clergy titles. It is appropriate to ask questions to clarify these matters. A congregation's website may also provide useful information.



4 Attend Worship Services, Festivals and Other Events

Attending worship services can contribute to successful partnerships with clergy and congregations. As feasible and appropriate, this is a respectful act that emphasizes the relationship rather than a specific end. Attending a service is an opportunity to better understand the traditions and practices of the congregations visited. It can also establish or deepen relationships with the clergy of the congregation, with lay leadership, and with individual congregants.

While attendance by local officials at worship services will likely be welcomed, there are protocols that may be helpful to keep in mind.

- **Logistics.** As each situation is unique, contact the appropriate clergy person in advance of a visit. Follow up with a phone call or e-mail to confirm attendance.
- **Speaking/Introductions.** If the goal is to be introduced or to share information, ask the clergy contact whether the worship service or some other forum would be the most appropriate.
- **At the Service.** If asked to say a few words, the local agency representative should briefly introduce himself or herself and succinctly share appropriate information with the congregants. You may also wish to invite individuals to speak with you after the service.
- **Protocols.** To show respect for the faith traditions of the congregation being visited as well as one's own personal beliefs, seek advice on what a visitor should do or not do during the service. Such advice may relate to such practices as standing, kneeling, songs, prayer, and so on. Clergy will be pleased to provide guidance about the appropriate role and practices of guests.

To generate working relationships broadly, local officials will want to visit a number of congregations. Design a matrix which begins with clergy the agency knows and includes some the agency does not. Develop the matrix to ensure visits to a set of congregations that is diverse by denomination, neighborhoods (or other geography), and demographics.

5 Involve and Prepare Local Agency Staff and Departments

Working relationships with clergy and congregations will involve local agency staff, especially department heads. It is important to ensure that staff have the knowledge and the capacity to develop and support these relationships.

Education and training in multi-faith awareness (for example, including a faith component in diversity training) will help fill what is often a vacuum on this topic among agency staff.¹² Such education provides county and city departments with insights and skills to more effectively engage with and serve the diversity of faiths in the community.

Opportunities for specific discussions among local agency staff that focus on the practical applications of working relationships with clergy and congregations may also be useful. For instance, ask departments to think about how working with and through clergy and congregations could benefit their work. For instance:

- Can the planning department attract additional participants for public engagement associated with a general plan update?

- Can the parks and recreation or health department work through clergy and congregations to better inform residents about baseball sign-ups or a vaccination program?
- Are fire department or emergency services personnel looking to add to the number of emergency shelters available?
- Is there a role for clergy in a program to address homelessness or prisoner reentry?

6 Think Broadly and Strategically About Ways to Work with Local Clergy and Congregations

How can a local agency benefit from building relationships with local clergy and congregations? This guide discusses three broad categories:

1. Extending local agency education and outreach;
2. Deepening and diversifying local agency public education efforts; and
3. Partnering, as appropriate, in the delivery of local agency programs and services.

Review the examples and recommendations in this guide, talk to other local officials who have pursued working relationships with clergy and congregations, and invite local clergy to work with you to consider the possibilities for such partnerships in your community.

Make a priority of relationship development and of ongoing and two-way communications with clergy

and congregations. This will make working partnerships possible, and more successful. What sort of communication from local agency leadership will respond to clergy and congregation interests and needs? What would clergy like to know about their county or city government, or about social or policy matters that impact their congregants?

Think about how your local agency can be responsive to clergy and congregations. Some congregations may have questions relating to local codes about congregant parking, expansion of their facilities, or the use of their buildings by multiple congregations. Perhaps changes in local bus routes will affect how young congregants get to school or influence how adults use public transportation. Local officials can provide clergy and congregations with up-to-date information and let them know how to get their questions answered.

The decision to concentrate efforts with certain congregations and not others should reflect clear criteria for these choices. For instance, increasing public input from less-engaged communities, or a desire to promote recreational programs for Spanish speakers may suggest outreach to congregations with significant Latino participation. If the agency wants to identify new shelters for senior residents in case of a natural disaster, congregations with such facilities may make sense. Clear communications about such choices will help maintain an agency's relationship with the broadest number of congregations.

It is helpful to remember that the leadership of local elected officials and senior managers to support working relationships with clergy and congregations sends an important signal to staff that this is an appropriate avenue for exploration and development.

Finally, as with any county or city effort to improve governance practices and service delivery, consider periodic review and assessment. This is likely to keep you on course, suggest needed adaptations, and strengthen effective working relationships with clergy and congregations over the longer term.



The Peninsula Clergy Network

Established with foundation support in 2002, the Peninsula Clergy Network (PCN) is a regional clergy network on the San Francisco Peninsula. An inclusive clergy organization,¹³ the PCN *maintains a database of the Peninsula's 440 clergy and 310 congregations, links the region's clergy and congregations, and supports increased interaction between clergy and public leaders.*

To address a perceived disconnect between the institutions of the religion sector and other sectors of the community, the Peninsula Clergy Network provides a framework to:

1. Increase relationships, understanding, and tolerance within the Peninsula's religion sector;
2. Promote collaboration between congregations and other sectors of the community, while honoring the respective functions of religion and state institutions; and
3. Support clergy as colleagues within the larger cadre of community leaders.

The Peninsula Clergy Network has transformed the professional relationships among the regions' clergy, while forging new relations between clergy and public and civic leaders.

Through this organization, clergy of all faiths work with local agencies, education, nonprofit and business leaders to address issues of importance to all Peninsula residents and communities. It does not promote religious solutions to public issues. Instead the organization supports the exchange of information and appropriate working relationships between religion and public institutions to foster awareness, understanding and community engagement

The organization has an executive director and staff, and is governed by a board of eighteen clergy. Additionally, twenty local and national community leaders serve on the Peninsula Clergy Network Community Advisory Board.

Further information is available at the website www.peninsulaclergy.org

Examples of Local Agency Relationships with Clergy and Congregations

1 Extending Local Agency Education and Outreach

Contra Costa County

In 2000, Contra Costa County formed a task force composed of local faith leaders, service providers, public health department staff, and active members of congregations. The task force continues to work together to remove the stigma associated with talking about HIV and to educate residents about AIDS prevention and treatment so that they may be more inclined to seek out county services. County staff worked with local clergy and other faith leaders to help leaders become more informed about this issue. Faith leaders in turn have sponsored events at their places of worship to engage the greater community.

“Faith leaders have been great advocates to allow the county to reach a larger audience,” reports a Contra Costa County Supervisor. “Especially on important public health issues, clergy have been very effective at getting a wider group of people to be concerned about an issue and to work towards solutions.

Active lay-leaders are also involved. One such leader who serves on the Christian education committee at St. Luke’s Missionary Baptist Church in Richmond observes, “elected officials can only do so much... it is going to take the participation and support of the local community, especially the faith community, to address difficult problems like AIDS, violence, and drugs.”

Riverside

More than 100 civic and clergy leaders from the City of Riverside gathered for “Partners in Community: Working Together in Difficult Economic Times – A Dialogue for Clergy and Civic Leaders” in 2009. In addition to a roundtable discussion, the city invited ten public and private agencies to the event to present information about the resources each organization could offer, especially those that would be beneficial during the

economic recessionary times. Each of the highlighted agencies had an informational booth set up in an exhibit room; they also made a brief presentation.

San Francisco

When local officials in San Francisco need to get information to the community, they often turn to the San Francisco Interfaith Council, a network of 800 congregations. For instance, a city attorney letter assuring immigrant residents that participation in the 2010 census would not put them at risk was e-mailed to Interfaith Council congregations. The Interfaith Council Executive Director reports that such information reaches congregants through worship services and congregational media. Officials have also worked through the Interfaith Council to alert the public to the danger of hate crimes and to inform low-income residents about how to cash checks and file taxes. Established after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, the SF Interfaith Council holds an annual conference to help congregations partner with local officials and humanitarian organizations to address disaster preparedness and recovery efforts.

San Mateo County/ Redwood City

Following Hurricane Katrina, and at the request of San Mateo County officials, the Peninsula Clergy Network joined the County Office of Emergency Services and the Red Cross of the Bay Area to formulate a plan to incorporate all 250 county congregations into the system of emergency services.

The city-based component of the plan began in Redwood City in partnership with the police and fire departments. The fifty congregations in Redwood City became integrated into local and regional plans to increase individual preparedness



and to provide response in the first three plus days of a disaster. This includes congregations designated to serve as “neighborhood response centers” and “neighborhood shelters.”

Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Sheriff’s Multi-Faith Clergy Council is a group of dedicated clergy and other faith community leaders who assist the Sheriff’s Department in multiple ways. Clergy Council members aid in the communications between the Sheriff’s Department and residents. They may also be called in to help resolve community conflicts and to help notify and comfort residents who have endured hardship, distress or trauma.

The Council also works with the Sheriff and his staff to organize an annual Community Day at which food, clothing, and information about employment opportunities, health care services, and first time home-buying are distributed to the public.

Clergy and congregations also share facilities that the community uses for activities, as well as support counseling and family crisis response teams. “The Clergy Council is an excellent example of dynamic and effective communication,” reports the Sheriff. “Together we can decrease crime and enhance the quality of services we provide.”

2 Deepening and Diversifying Public Engagement

Kern County

The Kern County Sheriff's office works with the East Bakersfield Faith Community Alliance to engage residents of the unincorporated community of East Bakersfield to reduce crime. At an initial meeting in 2007, the Faith Alliance organized a community meeting where the Sheriff promised the 650 residents in attendance that he would work with them to explore how to better staff the local sub-station. The Sheriff also committed to exploring how to improve the relationship between his department and local residents.

Since then, members of the Faith Alliance and the Sheriff have met every six months.

The Sheriff notes, "these meetings put us in touch with people who live in the community, and allowed us to learn about their issues in a collaborative and productive way, without finger-pointing or accusations."

The Sheriff says the meetings and his department's responsiveness to residents built a level of trust that empowers residents to call and share things with his deputies that the county didn't hear about before. This enables the department to identify and address community problems such as unsafe housing, code violations, and reducing graffiti and trash.

City of Mountain View

The City of Mountain View has convened dialogues involving elected officials and clergy periodically over the past few years. These conversations, held in an informal roundtable atmosphere, allowed participants to share information and perceptions and to discuss current issues together. The city has also worked through local congregations to inform residents about Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings and informational meetings for apartment owners and tenants. "Local members of the clergy know things about our community that we don't, and they can help us share information with residents," observes the city manager.

"People may say, 'Hey wait, there is supposed to be a separation of religion and state,'" acknowledges the former mayor, "but I say we are here not to talk politics but to work together to improve the community."

A few years ago, the then-mayor organized a "thank you" luncheon for leaders from all faiths in this community, including clergy representing a Korean Christian Church and a Buddhist Temple, as well as a leader from a local Ananda spiritual community. The goals were to: 1) thank clergy for their community contributions, 2) share information, and 3) explore opportunities for collaboration on issues of common interest. "People may say, 'Hey wait, there is supposed to be a separation of religion and state,'" acknowledges the former mayor, "but I say we are here not to talk politics but to work together to improve the community."



Cathedral City

Cathedral City has partnered with Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC) to reach predominantly low-income and Spanish-speaking residents of the Dream Home neighborhood. More recently the city has worked with a second ICUC chapter affiliated with the St. Louis Catholic Church that has a large Hispanic congregation from throughout the city.

Working through local congregations and public schools, the ICUC organization

trains and encourages residents to become community leaders as well as holds regular meetings with local officials in schools and other assessable neighborhood sites to discuss community issues and improvements.

The city manager suggests that recent meetings about a June 2010 tax measure were instrumental in helping the measure receive a favorable vote in that city. In fact, the Dream Homes area had the highest YES vote of any in Cathedral City.

The city manager also reports that all the ICUC community meetings have been an opportunity for improved dialogue and for local officials to hear from and respond to the needs of residents.

Speaking about the ongoing series of meetings with Dream Home community residents, he notes that, "we couldn't have reached this population without the help of Inland Congregations United for Change. Initially residents in this area felt that either they wouldn't be listened to or that they were not articulate enough to approach the city. Now people feel more confident to approach city hall and see if we can work together to improve things. Over the last several years there has been evident improvement in the neighborhood as a result."

City of Palo Alto

In Palo Alto, a designated city department head meets monthly with the local Ministerial Association in order to build relationships between city and religious leaders and to facilitate dialogue about civic issues of interest to both groups. The topics discussed have included affordable



housing, race relations, and community-police relationships. The clergy and city staff agree that the relationship building and enhanced two-way communication has been beneficial to all involved.

The city has also partnered with a collaboration of nonprofit organizations including Peninsula Interfaith Action to identify the need for, build, and operate an “Opportunity Center” that provides shelter and services to homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless.

City of Turlock

The City of Turlock has involved a broad cross-section of residents, including members of local faith organizations, to address homelessness. The city council organized a community workshop to bring together local homeless, homeless advocates, faith-based groups, service providers, and the public. The goal of the workshop was to decide how

to best address homelessness in their community. Working with local clergy and congregations, the city developed a new homeless shelter to serve the needs of the city’s growing homeless population.

“While a local city administration and staff can change, a faith-based organization has a constant mission and can provide a more stable base to meet the social service needs of the community,” says the city manager.

San Mateo and Northern Santa Clara Counties

Three times a year, the Peninsula Clergy Network hosts Peninsula-wide dialogues for clergy and public leaders (including city managers and council members, county administrators and supervisors, state legislators, school superintendents and board members, and college/university presidents). Each dialogue explores an important community issue in a roundtable format allowing participants to develop a mutual understanding of the issue addressed.

More locally-based discussions at the city and county level enhance these opportunities for dialogue, relationship building, and engagement. Key county and city department representatives participate. State and federal legislators have also joined discussions.

Through these dialogues and discussions, local officials gain awareness of constituent perspectives on community issues. These discussions also promote constituent engagement.

Clergy gain perspective on current topics of general community interest. This increases clergy capacity to pass along relevant city and county-related information, formally and informally, to their congregations. The discussions also reinforce clergy’s individual leadership roles in the community.



San Francisco Peninsula

City and county officials in the San Francisco Peninsula region have worked with organizers and leaders from Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA) to engage residents in important public policy decisions. PIA (www.piapico.org) an affiliate of the PICO national faith-based community organizing network, works with members of thirty diverse congregations and two local youth organizations to train community leaders.

For instance, the East Palo Alto’s City Council is working with PIA to engage the community in dialogue about a new rent control ordinance. PIA also worked with San Mateo county officials to launch a blue ribbon, multi-sector task to address health care access issues for low-income residents.





City of Fairfield

Multiple Fairfield city departments partner with clergy and congregations to serve the needs of low-income residents. For instance, members of local churches work with other volunteers to provide social services including tutoring and mentoring in low-income areas as part of the city's Quality Neighborhoods Program.

The Fairfield Redevelopment Agency owns property that is currently used as a homeless shelter operated by the Interfaith Council of Solano County.



The Fairfield Police Department has worked with a church and a local nonprofit organization to connect homeless people with local social service providers. In 2009, Fairfield also partnered with local congregations and Solano County staff to organize the largest food giveaway in the county's history.

According to city staff, Fairfield involves the faith community in service delivery projects because they are familiar with the community, can provide additional funding sources, and, most importantly, they want to be involved.

City of Hayward

In 2007, the City of Hayward established a day labor center operated by the South Hayward Parish, a nonprofit coalition of seven congregations providing a variety of social and educational services.

The center takes those looking for day labor off of a busy stretch of road near highway entrances where they used to congregate. The center also ensures contractors comply with the city's living wage ordinance. Other center activities include providing English language instruction, low-cost Spanish language health care services, and legal assistance.

South Hayward Parish staff and volunteers surveyed fifty local day laborers to better understand their needs before designing the center programs. The center is partially funded by the city, with the bulk of the program coming from charitable donations of both money and services.

City of East Palo Alto

As the City of East Palo Alto developed a day reporting center and community reentry program for parolees, they turned to a local clergy member to partner with them in the community service aspects of the project. The Pastor of the Born Again Christian Center already had experience working with city staff and assisting parolees; his church also is just a block from the center.

Through the center's services, parolees get job and skills training as well as paid work improving the community. The Pastor finds multiple ways to involve center clients in community activities such as speaking to students, participating in community meetings, and assisting seniors.

According to the center director, the Pastor has been a very effective partner. The director attributes this to the Pastor's experience working with the formerly incarcerated, his commitment, and his knowledge of the community.

City of Saratoga

When the City of Saratoga celebrated its 50th anniversary, the city council asked the local Ministerial Association to help organize block parties. The congregations organized many such parties that brought neighbors together to build new relationships and a stronger sense of community among residents.

"The City didn't have any staff available to organize and run these important community events, but the Ministerial Association stepped up and was happy to do it," according to Saratoga's Mayor. "The congregations do a lot to serve the social needs of the community."

Congregations in Saratoga also operate a homeless shelter. The Ministerial Association has worked with the city to create the Saratoga Serves program, through which each congregation creates a service project during the month of March.

3 Partnering in the Delivery of Programs and Services

City of Eureka

Facing a growing homelessness issue in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors established a Homeless Task Force that included a number of clergy and other congregational leaders. "The people from faith organizations had direct experience providing service to the local homeless, so they knew the population and their needs better than other members of the Task Force," reports a former Eureka city staff member. She also notes that clergy and congregations were instrumental in helping her meet the city manager's goal of setting up an emergency shelter in less than six weeks.

City of Brea

For well over 32 years, the City of Brea has enjoyed a very successful partnership with the Brea Ministerial Association, an association of approximately 20 churches in that community. The Brea Ministerial Association has "adopted" the city's Family Resource Center by providing grocery and gas cards, backpacks, and school supplies to distribute to needy Brea families. They are staunch supporters of city services and programs that help meet community needs, including home repairs and yard clean-up for Brea's frail seniors.

The Association also coordinates an annual community prayer breakfast, makes an annual scholarship presentation to Brea Olinda High School students, and participates in the city's Annual Country Fair. They are especially unique, comments a former city council member, because of the excellent relationship they have maintained with the city staff.

Resources

For resources relating to working relationships between local agencies and clergy and congregations, please visit the Institute for Local Government website at www.ca-ilg.org/congregations.

End Notes

- 1 In this publication, the terms “local agency” and “local agencies” generally refer to city and county government.
- 2 See www.ca-ilg.org/engagingcommunitiesurvey2008.
- 3 2004 Peninsula Clergy Network/University of Southern California study
- 4 U.S. Const. amend. I (Congress “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”).
- 5 Cal. Const. art. I, § 4 (“Free exercise and enjoyment of religion without discrimination or preference are guaranteed. The legislature shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”).
- 6 Cal. Const. art. XVI, § 5,
- 7 Cal. Const. art. IX, § 8.
- 8 See *Sands v. Morongo Unified School District*, 53 Cal. 3d 863, 281 Cal. Rptr. 34 (1991) (“These sections are proof of the framers intent to build a Jeffersonian wall of separation between church and state in California.”), *cert. denied*, 505 U.S. 1218, 112 S. Ct. 3026, 120 L. Ed. 2d 897 (1992) (prohibiting school district from including religious invocations at graduation ceremonies).
- 9 See *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 91 S. Ct. 2135, 29 L. Ed. 2d 745 (1971).
- 10 See *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 112 S. Ct. 2649, 120 L. Ed. 2d 467 (1992); *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet*, 512 U.S. 687, 114 S. Ct. 2481, 129 L. Ed. 2d 546 (1994) (statute creating a school district to serve only the Satmar Hasidic community not constitutional as it delegated state’s discretionary authority over public schools to religious community, in violation of establishment clause). *Cf. Stark v. Independent School District*, 123 F.3d 1068 (8th Cir. 1997), *cert. denied*, 523 U.S. 1094, 118 S. Ct. 1560, 140 L. Ed. 2d 792 (1998) (holding a school primarily attended by students belonging to a particular religion did not violate establishment clause since the government can neutrally provide benefits to a broad class of citizens defined without reference to religion). See also *Paulson v. City of San Diego*, 294 F.3d 1124 (9th Cir. 2002), *cert. denied*, 538 U.S. 978, 123 S. Ct. 1786, 155 L. Ed. 2d 666 (2003) (a proposed sale of government land which gave financial inducement to bidders to preserve cross violated the California Constitution).
- 11 Tanakh is the name of the Jewish scriptural text. Tanakh includes Torah, Writings and Prophets. This is also the text which composes the earlier books of the Christian scriptural text, the Bible.
- 12 For example, the Peninsula Clergy Network offers such training programs to city and county staff in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.
- 13 The Peninsula Clergy Network serves the area generally encompassed by San Mateo and northern Santa Clara counties.



About the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government promotes good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities. The Institute is the nonprofit research and education affiliate of the California State Association of Counties and the League of California Cities.

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