



# The FAITHS Initiative of The San Francisco Foundation

by Landon R. Williams, Coordinator, FAITHS Initiative

## WHAT IS THE FAITHS INITIATIVE?

The Foundation Alliance with Interfaith To Heal Society (FAITHS) is an initiative of The San Francisco Foundation (TSFF), one of the largest community foundations in the United States. The Initiative aims to enhance the work of faith-based organizations that deliver secular services or advocate for their communities. FAITHS does this by connecting faith-based organizations with assistance from nonprofits and foundations. We also provide direct technical and financial assistance to faith-based organizations and hold educational briefings for faith community leadership.

FAITHS was founded in 1993 to respond to the concerns of clergy and lay leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area (Bay Area) that they were not able to gain the support of organized philanthropy for their efforts to implement secular programs. This was the era when welfare reform and federal devolution legislation was being proposed before the U.S. Congress. An interfaith group of 15 faith leaders met with program staff of TSFF to voice their grave concern that as government withdrew from delivering social service programs and support, the faith community would be forced to pick up the burden, lest many of the residents of their communities fall through the rapidly eroding safety net. These faith leaders believed that the faith community had a major role to play in providing safety net services but lacked the resources and capacity to do so, and were thus seeking the support of organized philanthropy. In the eight years since that meeting, FAITHS has built an interfaith network of more than 350 congrega-



## MISSION STATEMENT

The Foundation Alliance with Interfaith To Heal Society (FAITHS) enhances the human service delivery and advocacy capacity of San Francisco Bay Area faith organizations, builds relationships within and beyond the faith community, identifies opportunities to support strategic community development efforts, and educates philanthropy about strengthening communities through faith-based institutions.



tions and grassroots organizations that meet regularly to problem-solve around community issues in the five Bay Area counties that TSFF serves (Marin, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa and San Mateo).

## GOVERNANCE

The CEO and Board of Trustees of the Foundation review and approve all FAITHS' grants and have the final word about the Initiative's direction and programs. Within that framework, FAITHS incorporates input from clergy- and lay-led governing and planning teams for decision-making and advising the CEO and Board of Trustees. A Leadership Group of 20 leaders representing the diversity of the Bay Area faith community determines the general direction of FAITHS's projects and convenings. This group meets quarterly to provide guidance and insight to the work of the Initiative. Assisting this group are

two 30-member planning teams that inform the day-to-day work of FAITHS: a Race and Community Relations Planning Team and an Economic Justice and Opportunity Planning Team (EJO). This structure provides more than 15 different opportunities annually for the Foundation to connect with the 80 faith-based organizations affiliated with FAITHS' leadership and planning teams.

## IMPACT AND PROBLEM SOLVING

The initiative's philanthropic partners recognize that the primary benefit of FAITHS is convening and problem-solving with the community. The major community input event sponsored by FAITHS, *The Vision is Justice*, became the catalyst for prioritizing issues and follow-up action by congregations. The forum was convened on November 18, 1999, at Preservation Park in Oakland, where 154 faith- and community-based organizations reviewed the strategic role that faith communities throughout the Bay Area play in addressing critical issues. Identified issues include affordable housing, inter-group relations, job training, senior service provision and youth development. Some examples of what the FAITHS' network is doing to follow-up on the identified priorities are:

*Affordable Housing:* This is one of the top priorities identified for action by the FAITHS EJO Planning Team. FAITHS is training key congregation leaders to take action on the affordable housing issue. The work began with an eight-part Affordable Housing Training Institute that provided concentrated technical and financial assistance

to congregations engaged in specific housing activities (advocacy and/or development). This is being followed up with a series of local workshops and meetings from summer 2000 through spring 2002. Long-term partnerships with nonprofit organizations and other public and private resources (e.g. financial institutions) that address affordable housing remain principal objectives of this effort.

*Youth Development and High-Risk Youth Intervention:* FAITHS' youth leadership development includes a summer-long youth leadership development training project. The training provides an opportunity for 15 youth leaders to spend a summer as interns with the Foundation and covers a realm of activities, including hands-on grantmaking. The youth develop priorities and criteria for grants, research the groups, solicit proposals, make the awards and contribute seven weeks of volunteer service with youth-servicing agencies.

*Senior Services:* The FAITHS Legacy Project, supported by the California Wellness Foundation, builds the capacity of congregations to respond to the needs and concerns of seniors. While health screenings are a key component of the service delivery, we are also focusing on transportation, resource development and community awareness. The sessions have resulted in several pilot projects to maximize health outcomes for seniors involving congregations throughout the Bay Area.

#### GRANTMAKING AND PARTNERSHIPS

FAITHS' grant work supports community building. Our 2001-02 budget will exceed \$500,000. The grants are prioritized to faith-based organizations working on issues of affordable housing policy and development, youth organizing and development, inter-group relations, civic engagement and capacity building. Since 1993, FAITHS has raised \$3.8 million to support this

work. The overwhelming majority of these funds were re-granted out to support secular work by faith-based organizations. FAITHS small grant work to catalyze community building with grassroots organizations was recognized by the National Council of Foundations at its 2000 annual conference as a national model. This fiscal year, foundation partners expect FAITHS to re-grant \$250,000 to a number of faith-based organizations. An additional \$70,000 will be used to support a youth development program, local convening and workshops on issue areas.

FAITHS' partnerships with foundations represent an exciting model for philanthropic involvement with congregations engaged in community development. Some examples include:

- The partnership with the James Irvine Foundation (Irvine) provides small grants that improve the capacity of congregations to become involved in civic engagement. Using a combination of support from Irvine and TSFF, FAITHS has awarded a round of Community Partners grants to 15 congregations and faith-based organizations each year for the last four years. In the 2000 and 2001 awards, special emphasis was given to congregations working on issues of cultural diversity that involved youth. This was especially important in the Bay Area in the wake of a burgeoning local youth advocacy movement initiated by youth opposition to Proposition 21. That proposition lowered the age at which youth can be tried as adults, expanded the definition of gang-related activities, and mandates that juvenile offenses be counted as strikes for the purpose of enforcing California's "Three Strikes" law. The specific work of the thirty-member Race and Community Relations Planning Team involves a

combination of community briefings, small grants and capacity building informed by the work of the community partners

- Foundation support helped to underwrite the *Demystifying Economics* training series, which focused on teaching faith-based organizations understand how national policies and international events impact the work they are doing at the local level. We were also able to address strategic planning and assist some of the congregations to form 501(c)3 organizations to carry out their community development work. Over 125 faith-based organizations participated in the training, which was held throughout our service area. There were a number of tangible projects as a result of the training. One of the most notable being the purchase and rehabilitation of a strip mall to stabilize the rents of the only pediatrician in the area that accepted MediCal patients, and to provide space for the congregation's housing development and senior services programs

FAITHS current philanthropic partners include The Ford Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, The Koshland Program, The Peninsula Community Foundation, The Walter and Elise Haas Fund and The Marin Community Foundation. FAITHS has also worked collaboratively with Bank of America, Washington Mutual and other members of the financial community. Going forward, we are looking for opportunities to explore how the affordable housing development work of our network might be supported by financial institutions implementing the Community Reinvestment Act.

#### DISSEMINATION OF BEST PRACTICES

Part of the mandate of FAITHS is the systematic sharing of best practices attained from our work with the faith

community. These lessons are shared not only with foundations that are considering partnering with various faith communities, but also with public agencies, the independent sector, corporations and other entities involved in community building. In addition to numerous San Francisco Bay Area presentations, FAITHS staff has been engaged in information exchange and consultation in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Michigan, Philadelphia, New York, Seattle and Los Angeles. FAITHS also produces a number of descriptive documents that chronicle our growth and development, and summarize our work and achievements. *CI*

*Interested readers can contact FAITHS at: (415) 733-8572 or visit our website: [www.sff.org](http://www.sff.org).*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



LONDON R. WILLIAMS is coordinator of the FAITHS Initiative of The San Francisco Foundation (TSFF). TSFF is one of the largest community foundations in the country (with assets of \$700 million) and provides grants to nonprofit organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Grantmaking subject areas include health, education, environment, economic and social justice, arts, neighborhoods and community

development—all with an emphasis on assisting under-served populations. The Foundation is home for a number of special initiatives that have a particular focus and a limited life.

Prior to joining TSFF, Mr. Williams was a consultant providing organizational and economic development assistance to the nonprofit sector. Prior to that, he served as an assistant to the city manager for the City of Berkeley, and as marketing director for Independent Power Corporation in Oakland. His background includes starting and directing nonprofits, public policy analysis, grantmaking and small business and housing development.

Mr. Williams holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California at Berkeley, where he also earned his master's degree in public policy from the Goldman School for Public Policy.