



## COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

### California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL)

**Faiths /Traditions Represented:** African Methodist Episcopal, American Baptist Churches USA, The Association of Unity Churches, Baha'i Faith, Baptist, Buddhist, Christian, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Science, Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.), Church of the Brethren, Community of Christ, The Episcopal Church, USA Evangelical, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America , Full Gospel, Hindu, Humanist, Independent, Independent Catholic Churches, International, Interfaith/Interdenominational, Mennonite, Muslim, Jewish, Latvian Lutheran Church in America, Non-Denominational, The Presbyterian Church (USA), Quaker, Roman Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Shamanism, Spiritualist, Swedenborgian, Sufi, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church, Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

**Location of CC:** California, USA

**Key Areas of Focus:** Environment

**Mission:** The mission of California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL) is to be faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. This ministry intends to protect the earth's ecosystems, safeguard public health, and ensure sufficient, sustainable energy for all.

#### **Summary:**

*California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL) is a network of religious communities in California who are united to address Global Warming. These religious congregations do things like make energy and water conservation improvements to their houses of worship, install solar panels, hold training programs for other congregations and lobby their state and local governments for stronger climate policies and investments in renewable energy. CIPL sees climate change as a problem that affects ALL people and an important opportunity for people to bond together to solve it.*

#### **1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?**

California is the most populous and most diverse state in the country and we are working with congregations of all faiths across the state. We see diversity in three main areas:

- Faith traditions: California is diverse not only within faith traditions (i.e., different denominations/sects within religions) but also in the number of traditions. There



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are Buddhist monasteries, Muslim temples, various denominations of churches, etc.

- Ethnicities: There is also a lot of cultural diversity in California with a large variety of immigrant and multilingual communities. These communities often also have their own religious communities.
- Economics: We have a huge gap of the “haves” and “have-nots,” with the “have-nots” being disproportionately affected by climate change. For example, as the polar ice caps melt and the sea levels rise, a lot of the communities in the San Francisco Bay Area that are expected to be most affected are also those that are struggling economically. There are also issues, such as in the San Joaquin Valley, which has been profoundly affected by the drought – which is likely connected to climate change.

We are trying to make sure we engage our community on all of these levels. For some communities interfaith and environmental work has long been priorities, but in some contexts, there has been less outreach and awareness building etc. Poorer communities are already among those most affected by pollution and will suffer greater consequences as a result of a warmer planet.

### **2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?**

I think that it's important that this issue is not written off as one person's or one particular group's issue of the moment. It's a global issue. It impacts us regardless of our faith, or cultural or racial background and it's important for the religious community to show solidarity and collaboration in addressing this issue.

All people have an obligation to address the climate crisis as both an environmental crisis and human rights issues. Because this issue has such far-reaching consequences it's harmful for people to think, “Only Catholics care about this” or, “Only Unitarian Universalists care about this.” It's vital to connect across the strata to address this challenge.

One of the gifts of this challenge – if there are any gifts – is that it can show how we can support one another. This crisis can be an opportunity to help strengthen empathy, compassion, solidarity and ties across boundaries.



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### **3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out this year?**

In 2014, California Interfaith Power & Light's statewide network of congregations committed to confront climate change inspired interfaith collaboration across California, successfully defended our state's landmark Global Warming Solutions Act and equipped leaders with resources, connections and inspiration to reduce their carbon footprints, learn more about the climate crisis and advocate for clean energy. It was a very full year, our activities included:



- Hosting webinars on solar financing with over 140 participants,
- Holding a Sacramento Lobby Day, which saw record turnouts,
- Participating in California solidarity events with the NYC People's Climate March,
- Re-launching our annual awards event where we celebrated 24 diverse faith communities from San Diego to Sonoma, Fresno to Los Angeles that are responding to the climate crisis through advocacy, green building improvements, youth and young adult engagement and education.
- Member congregations have:
  - hosted climate thought leaders like George Marshall, Bill McKibben and Joanna Macy,
  - signed petitions in support of the new EPA coal power plant regulations and,
  - Lobbied for state investment in green technology such as zero emission vehicles.

Going forward in 2015, we are working hard to grow our network of congregations. Politically, we are supporting new legislation in the California legislature connected with the governor's call for increasing renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions and increasing energy efficiency by making sure faith communities that care about climate change stand behind those bills.

### **4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?**

We work very broadly with a large portion of our diversity coming from within traditions. Furthermore, we're trying to enliven interfaith collaboration on climate change through the working group structure, which brings congregation who are members of the CC (and some who are not) together based on geographic locations. (For more, see question 9 and question 7)



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We would also like to continue to expand the variety of communities we reach. There is room for expanding our geographic, denominational, socioeconomic and multicultural diversity. I also feel a strong pull toward reaching the Hindu and Asian American communities; as well as better reaching Latino and African American congregations. We are partnering with other organizations, such as “Green for All” and APEN, to reach these communities. We also hope to amplify Indigenous voices on these issues.



**5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.**

We bring people together by uniting them around a specific issue that affects us all. If more than 90 percent of scientists told the public, “Stop drinking water, it’s poisoning you,” we wouldn’t say, “Oh that’s just a Baptist issue,” or “That’s an Episcopalian issue”; we would all come together. And that is what we are calling for on this issue. We can’t address this just as Presbyterians – we have to come together collectively. I may believe in the Trinity and you may pray to Allah but that doesn’t mean we can’t learn to address this challenge together. Air pollution is air pollution, sea level rise is sea level rise, oceans without fish are oceans without fish– these matters have nothing to do with your race, class culture or religion.

It is important for people to wrestle with these issues within their own tradition as well. For example, we challenge people to ask, “If my tradition is not discussing this issue, why?” We also encourage faith communities to articulate, from within their own belief system, why caring for Creation matters.

We also help members examine and reduce their carbon footprint, educate them on what is happening politically and empower them to become advocates for statewide policy that will help mitigate the problem of climate change. Every year we hold a Lobby Day where members go to the State Capitol to advocate for climate policies. One year, we had a Rabbi, Buddhist nun, a Catholic sister and congregants from the United Church of Christ all show up to talk to their senator about this issue. This type of unity over a single issue was an incredibly powerful statement to lawmakers!

We also have an annual celebration, called the Cool Climate Awards, where we gather congregations who have made substantial reductions in their carbon footprint, gone solar, done water reduction projects, etc... That is really a time for members of different faiths to gather and celebrate.



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### **6. *Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve?***

We would like the state of California to be generating 100% renewable power by 2050. There are plans that could make that possible and we would like to make sure the faith community is a strong partner in making that a reality. We also want to help ensure that the faith community is not an impediment to responding to climate change but is an example of positive change. The earth, our shared home, is sick and needs our attention. If we are practicing our faith, of course we will want to come to the Earth's aid. And if not for the planet itself, to those who are suffering, and will suffer more due to global warming.

We also hope to help spiritual leaders address the depth of this struggle that we're in. The question becomes, "How will we be remembered as a faith community at large? Did we just stick our heads in the sand? What was our response to this?" I think you can hear a variety of responses but the one we try to offer is that we can be a part of solutions that can help keep the problem from getting worse.

We can create a different World where we care about climate change and those affected by climate change. Many believe this is one of the most critical moral issues of our time. There is a lot more we should all be doing because, even if things go well as far as political and societal solutions to the problem, we are still going to still have to deal with sea level rise and other impacts of a warmer planet.

### **7. *How do you see your CC's work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?***

Cooperation among people of different traditions is mostly happening in our working groups. For example, member congregations are choosing to start their own collaborations with each other to create a pro-active approach to climate change in their geographic area. We have seen great success with the regional working group in the San Francisco Peninsula (see question 9) and are also seeing strong relationships in the Sacramento area and Contra Costa County. We hope to see more of them forming in the future across the state including the Central Valley.

Aside from within these groups, there is a very natural process of cooperation that happens. For example, when one congregation gets solar panels, the congregation down the street asks, "How did you do that?"

There are already some existing relationships between people of faith in communities where we work, but working together to address a global problem creates greater unity. It gives people a platform to do outreach and tell people, "We're not proselytizing. The world can come together and admit we have a problem and we can work together to do something about it."



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### **8. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?**

The First Mennonite Church in San Francisco meets at a Jewish synagogue, Congregation Sha'ar Zahav. Together, they hold an annual Thanksgiving service with the San Francisco Zen Center. This year it was focused on drought and included Muslim communities from Indonesia. Another example is a Jewish synagogue in Sacramento that hosted an Earth Care Conference and cohosted the event with the local Interfaith Council. We are seeing actions like these throughout California.

This shows that the level of comfort and respect that exists between these different faith communities is growing. Among some congregation, being in contact with one another is becoming much easier and, in some cases, is becoming a regular practice. Yet, there is still more work to be done! Some groups have not been as engaged in interfaith conversations.

### **9. Please share a specific short story about your CC's work that might teach a lesson about interfaith or inspire other CCs.**

In 2014, the Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action (PICA), a regional working group of CIPL, group asked the Palo Alto City Council to send a message to the state employee pension fund requesting that they remove all of their investments in fossil fuels. And they were successful – in part because of the broad array of religious voices they were able to pull together!

Palo Alto City Council member Cory Wolbach told the news blog Eden Keeper, “I was inspired to see the passionate and effective work of these congregations collecting 152 signed letters on behalf of fossil fuel divestment. Those letters, presented by a cross-



denominational coalition, sent a very powerful moral statement.”

You can read more about this here:  
<http://bit.ly/1NBdWZX>



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**10. Do you collaborate and/or communicate with other CCs in the network? If yes, please describe a few examples. If no, please explain why you have been unable to link up with other CCs.**

We regularly collaborate and communicate with the following Cooperation Circles:

- San Francisco Interfaith Council
- Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County
- Orange County Coalition for the Environment
- Silicon Valley Interreligious Council
- Interfaith Initiative of Santa Barbara County
- Spiritual and Religious Alliance for Hope (SARAH)

We also work with congregations who are part of the Marin Interfaith Council.

One particular example of collaboration is when, a couple of months ago, Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (SiVIC) invited me to participate in a conference on compassion. A number of their members are also California Interfaith Power and Light congregations and SiVIC participates in the “Sun Up Our Sanctuaries” campaign, so we have a lot of shared values and have opportunities to share resources, teach, collaborate on conference material content, etc. With some other Cooperation Circles we plan events and educational trainings and share lists. In addition, Program Director Will Scott participated in the Environmental Satellite workshop following Circles of Light in 2015.

Aside from those who we are already in communication with, it’s a logical connection for us to work with any circle seeking to address climate change.

**11. How is your CC’s work helping to achieve the mission of URI?**

We are promoting daily interfaith cooperation to address, primarily, global warming, and its impacts on human and planetary health.

We are working to address the problem of climate change and realize that how we address this problem is important too. There’s an opportunity in this to address the roots of violence, which often can be about resources, such as air, land, water and oil. So, at the core, addressing climate change is addressing violence. The urgent matter of the planet’s warming is an invitation to engage on a deeper level of religious beliefs.

We want to solve the problem of global warming in such a way that strengthens the weak but also leads to more equitable sharing of resources. We are trying to make sure the world’s faith traditions admit that there is a problem and that together we can work toward common solutions.



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***12. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?***

The real challenges are race and class. Often in interfaith work one can find people of different faiths sitting together in the same room, and yet they all may come from the same economic or racial background. It's great that we can get along with each other, but we must also work across race and class boundaries too. It's sometimes easier for an affluent community to have a robust interfaith community, yet not know their poorer neighbors.

For some people interfaith and inter-spirituality have been a part of their life for as long as they can remember, but there are others who are not as comfortable or familiar. For example, within some Evangelical Christian or Muslim communities, there can be the question, "Am I betraying my faith by sitting at a table and working regularly with people who do not share my faith [evangelizing]?" We need to be look at these gaps around our table and ask ourselves, "Who are we not including in the conversation?" "How do we engage Evangelical communities? Chinese American communities? Or other communities who don't share our backgrounds?"

***13. How is being part of URI helping your CC to achieve its goals?***

UR is helping us by making connections and introductions and helping us see places of growth for our network. URI is holding out the vision of global interfaith collaboration, which frees us up to invite focus on the climate. By URI taking the lead on asking people to trust each other, talk to each other, etc., we are able to emphasize and focus on climate change, carbon footprints, renewable energy etc.

***14. What do you feel your CC is giving other CCs in the URI network?***

We're helping to bring climate to the forefront and helping people realize the need for a global response. We're helping to push the urgency of addressing climate change.

***15. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?***

Keep doing what you're doing! URI provides us with the substantial relationship resources that you've established throughout the world. Through URI we are able to gain access to and collaborate with larger networks, leaders and a variety of voice we would otherwise not have access to. URI also supports us by highlighting the good work that is happening in our Cooperation Circle, our congregations and working groups. URI is helping to amplify the moral voice for climate action.