

New Federal Initiatives Project

**Update: Overview of the White House Office
on Faith-Based and Neighborhood
Partnerships and the Council on Faith-Based
and Neighborhood Partnerships**

By

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Update: Overview of the White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

President Barack Obama has announced the remaining members of the 25-person President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.¹ The Council, composed of religious and secular leaders and scholars from various backgrounds, is part of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The President's Council will form various task forces to study issues and make recommendations to the President, White House staff, and other government officials. These Taskforces will include: Reform of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Economic Recovery and Fighting Poverty, Fatherhood and Healthy Families, Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation, Environment and Climate Change, and Global Poverty, Health and Development. Although much attention is focused on how the Administration will handle the question of whether faith-based organizations receiving federal funds can choose to maintain their identity by making employment decisions on the basis of religion, the White House has explained that the Council will not consider this issue; instead, it will be left to the Department of Justice and the Office of the White House Counsel.

Announced Council members include:

Anju Bhargava, Founder, Asian Indian Women of America (New Jersey). Ms. Bhargava is the Principal Director of Global Synergy Associates, an international management consulting firm. Ms. Bhargava has conducted and participated extensively in interfaith dialogues at the local, state, national and international levels. She is the Hindu representative for Livingston's Interfaith Clergy Association, a member of the Collective Hindu Initiative, and the first Hindu woman Pujari in New Jersey.

Bishop Charles Blake, Presiding Bishop, Church of God in Christ (Los Angeles, California). Bishop Blake serves as Presiding Bishop of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), a predominantly black Pentecostal denomination with six million members. He pastors the West Angeles Church of God in Christ, which has a membership of over 24,000 and provides the community with more than 80 programs for psychological, social, and economic development. As founder and CEO of Save Africa's Children, Bishop Blake supervises the care of more than 100,000 children in over 23 African nations. At the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Bishop Blake criticized those who show "disregard for the lives of the unborn" and challenged Sen. Obama to develop policies to reduce abortions.

Noel Castellanos, CEO, Christian Community Development Association (Chicago, Illinois). The mission of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) is "to inspire, train, and connect Christians who seek to bear witness to the Kingdom of God by reclaiming and restoring under-resourced communities." Now CEO of CCDA, Rev. Castellanos has worked in full-time ministry in urban communities for over 25 years, serving in youth ministry, church planting, and community development in San Francisco, San Jose, and Chicago. He also established the CCDA Institute, which works to equip emerging church leaders in the philosophy of Christian community development.

The Rev. Peg Chamberlin, President-Elect, National Council of Churches USA (Minneapolis, Minnesota). In November 2009, Rev. Chamberlin, a Moravian clergywoman, will become the leader of the National Council of Churches. The National Council represents 45 million people in more than 100,000 local congregations including Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African American, and Living Peace churches. As executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches for 13 years, Rev. Chamberlin encouraged interaction with Native American tribal leadership, and, following the Interstate 35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis, she organized a prayer service for a broad group of religious leaders including Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and member denominations of the Council.

Nathan Diament, Director of Public Policy, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (Washington, D.C.). Mr. Diament develops and coordinates public policy research and initiatives on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community. He has written many articles and essays on religion and policy issues, has testified before congressional committees, and has worked with members of both political parties to develop legislation. The Orthodox Union's press release on Mr. Diament's appointment to the President's Council notes parenthetically, "Service on the Council neither requires nor implies an endorsement by Mr. Diament, or the Orthodox Union, of any particular Administration policy."

Harry Knox, Director, Religion and Faith Program, Human Rights Campaign (Washington, D.C.). The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) works on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans. Since Mr. Knox joined HRC's Religion and Faith Program in 2005, it has created a national speakers' bureau that reaches more than 10 million Americans monthly and a weekly preaching resource that provides an ecumenical gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender perspective on the Bible. Mr. Knox previously worked as a business manager for the American Cancer Society, Georgia Division; director of development at Equality Florida; executive director of Georgia Equality; and program director for Freedom to Marry.

Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director, Gallup Center for Muslim Studies (Washington, D.C.). The Gallup Center for Muslim Studies is a nonpartisan research center dedicated to providing data-driven analysis on the views of Muslim populations around the world. Ms. Mogahed leads the analysis of Gallup's survey of one billion Muslims around the world, and has coauthored the book *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. She also directs the Muslim-West Facts Initiative (www.muslimwestfacts.com), through which Gallup and Coexist Foundation are disseminating the findings of the Gallup poll to leaders in the Muslim World and the West.

Anthony Picarello, General Counsel, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is the official leadership body of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and is composed of all members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (bishops and archbishops). Prior to joining USCCB in 2007, Mr. Picarello worked for seven years at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty where, on behalf of people of all faiths, he litigated major religious freedom cases under the Free Speech, Free Exercise, and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment, as well as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He is one of the nation's leading experts on the federal

Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 and in 2007 was named to The American Lawyer's list of the top 50 litigators under age 45.

Nancy Ratzan, National President, National Council of Jewish Women (Miami, Florida). The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates, inspired by Jewish values, which promotes social justice and individual rights. Among her various roles within NCJW, Ms. Ratzan chaired NCJW's judicial nominations campaign, BenchMark: NCJW's Campaign to Save Roe, and served on an interfaith mission to China to investigate family planning practices. As an attorney, Ms. Ratzan specialized in appellate, First Amendment, and higher education law.

Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (Indianapolis, Indiana). Dr. Watkins is general pastor and CEO of the 700,000-member Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. Early in her career, she spent two years as a missionary in the Congo, working on adult literacy programs. She has also pastored several churches. She is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches based in Geneva, serves on the National Council of Church's governing board, and is a board member of Sojourners/Call to Renewal.

**Rebecca R. Dummermuth served as Associate Director for Legal Affairs in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives from 2003 - 2005. Prior to that, Mrs. Dummermuth worked as Legal Counsel at The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C., and served in the Bush Administration's Department of Labor as Special Assistant to the Solicitor. A graduate of Washington and Lee University School of Law, Mrs. Dummermuth clerked for the Honorable Rhesa Hawkins Barksdale on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Since leaving the White House, Mrs. Dummermuth has focused her energies on being a wife, mom, and homemaker. She and her husband Matt live in Iowa with their two children.*

¹ Council members announced on Feb. 5, 2009 were: Diane Baillargeon, President & CEO, Seedco, a secular national operating intermediary; Dr. Arturo Chavez, Ph.D., President & CEO, Mexican American Cultural Center; Fred Davie, President, Public / Private Ventures, a secular non-profit intermediary; Pastor Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor, Northland, a Church Distributed; Bishop Vashti M. McKenzie, Presiding Bishop, 13th Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Church; Rev. Otis Moss, Jr., Pastor emeritus, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church; Dr. Frank S. Page, President emeritus, Southern Baptist Convention; Eboo S. Patel, Founder & Executive Director, Interfaith Youth Corps; Melissa Rogers, Director, Wake Forest School of Divinity Center for Religion and Public Affairs; Rabbi David N. Saperstein, Director & Counsel, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; Dr. William J. Shaw, President, National Baptist Convention, USA; Father Larry J. Snyder, President, Catholic Charities USA; Richard Stearns, President, World Vision; Judith N. Vredenburg, President and CEO, Big Brothers / Big Sisters of America; Rev. Jim Wallis, President & Executive Director, Sojourners. For further background on these Council members, see http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/pubid.1333/pub_detail.asp.

Related Links

President Obama Announces Additional Members of Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-Announces-Additional-Members-of-Advisory-Council-on-Faith-Based-and-Neighborhood-Partnerships/

An Overview of the White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
http://www.fed-soc.org/publications/pubid.1333/pub_detail.asp