

# Grace in the Golden State

**Progressive Religion in Southern California**

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ETHICS, RELIGION, AND PUBLIC LIFE

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# GRACE IN THE GOLDEN STATE: PROGRESSIVE RELIGION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In his influential book *Progressive and Religious*,<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Jones identifies five features of the progressive religious movement within the United States:

- An Emphasis on Social Injustice
- A Relational Approach to Truth
- A Rigorous and Critical Engagement with Tradition
- A Belief in the Unity of All Humanity
- A New Vision of America: From Empire to Interdependence and Generosity

He makes clear the broad movement is more than a liberal political platform. It is not simply an ideological reaction – the “Religious Left” – as opposed to the conservative “Christian Right,” which continues as very visible and influential after several decades. Rather, the movement is driven by people with a strong religious faith, yet one not dogmatic or lacking in respect of others with differing religious, or even non-religious views. As with other social movements, it is not contained within institutional religious boundaries but draws on the support and participation of many others who are like-minded in belief and values across various social sectors. People are brought together around a variety of concerns: social justice; the common good versus personal greed; the interests of the country above the politics of division; and spiritual values over against so much emphasis on materialism and consumption. Perhaps more than anything else, what unites the movement is a concern that the country reclaim a strong moral center, one which as Jim Wallis says differs from what we all too often observe, “a soulless centrism or a mushy middle,” then adds, “We say, ‘Don’t go left, don’t go right, go deeper.’”<sup>2</sup>

Here we examine the progressive religious movement within Southern California. “Grace in Southern California is like grace anywhere of course, reaching out to people and trying to make the world a better place, and especially for people in need,” a Lutheran pastor in Brentwood told us, “but how we do it, our concerns and priorities may be a little different.” The report summarizes the results of a three-year study, 2008 to 2011 making use of various methods of study. It provides an overview on how progressive activists within the region understand faith in today’s ideologically polarized context; their priorities of social issues currently; the region’s religious and cultural climate; and some challenges the movement now faces. Attached as well is a lengthy though hardly complete list of progressive advocacy organizations plus names of some congregations brought to our attention as centers of activity in the Appendix.



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Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace

## THAT WORD “PROGRESSIVE”

Across the country there is debate about the word “progressive” as used in the religious context currently, and Southern California is no exception. We asked people about this and some had fairly straight-forward answers, others were much more cautious and reflective. What follows is a mapping of sorts of the region’s progressive terrain as we encountered it.

Progressive versus Liberal. By far the people we talked with preferred the label “progressive” to either “liberal” or “religious left.” Labels define positive identities, but also opposing identities as when a spokesperson at the Jewish World Watch told us that “progressive is an alternative to liberal, better because it doesn’t sound as threatening.” An Iranian Jew in Westwood, he said his congregation was progressive but by that he did not necessarily mean liberal-leaning in politics, but rather it “was open to and tolerant of new and different ideas, values, priorities, and lifestyles.” He preferred restricting the term to religion being open and adaptive, avoiding any political connotation. Others voiced this same concern for religious openness, often rather cryptically as “thinking outside a box,” “to be inclusive,” “to live under a big umbrella,” and “to listen to new interpretations of scripture and theology.”

Theologically more nuanced ways of saying much the same were voiced as well: “We believe in progressive revelation and salvation, what we call ‘open Christianity,’” commented a para-church activist in Los Angeles, somewhat in keeping with the emerging-church author Brian McLaren’s assertion that he’s an “unfinished Christian.”<sup>3</sup> McLaren acknowledges that he is a product of many religious traditions – that he has been influenced by, and committed to at least seven differing views of Jesus – and still welcomes further growth in his faith. A Methodist professor in Thousand Oaks spoke of being a part of a “living tradition that is not hermetically sealed from social, political, and philosophical traditions,” her point being that while traditions inevitably take on colors from their cultural and intellectual environments still they evolve theologically as they relate to the challenges of the times. However the point was expressed, the message was quite clear: to be a religious progressive in southern California is to engage religious tradition, and not to be bound by literalism or old metaphors; and to see religious institutions not as frozen in time but as embodying “lived” traditions.

In thinking about religious influence evolving, most obvious are the faith-based nongovernmental organizations. These types of organizations have made it easier for like-minded people across faith traditions, within local communities and more broadly throughout the country and world to join together in common causes. Pooling resources and concentrating on particular causes allows them to accomplish than can separate congregations or denominations. Transnational NGOs also extend our visions and connect us with the broader humanity. To some people the very idea of connecting globally in a framework of faith and action was itself something progressive. No doubt faith-based NGOs flourish in California in no small part because they mesh so well with the region’s fluid environment, its innovativeness, and long history of global connections. Progressives speak warmly about their involvement in such organizations, though of course conservative activists can, and do claim much the same.

But a few people preferred to describe the movement as “liberal,” and usually as having a political connotation. As a UCC minister in Van Nuys put it, “to me the word progressive signals politically liberal and working for those who are less fortunate. Look at the social issues, poverty, class, gay and lesbian rights, and so forth,” she went on to say, “all very much on the liberal agenda, so yes, progressive has to mean liberal.” Another minister, a Methodist in Torrance who says she is progressive on many social issues but considers herself a centrist theologically had the following to say: “Progressive means working toward reforms and the betterment of situations, which tends to be a liberal agenda and which is fine with me.” Some pointed, directly or indirectly, to the fact that the agendas of progressives were positioned frequently in response to the conservatives. “So then, why not call the movement liberal?” asked a member of a Hollywood community church. For clergy, often the concern was how best



Photo Courtesy Progressive Christians Uniting

to represent oneself publicly – as “progressive” or as “liberal.” They know that members in their congregations easily conflate the religious and the political, such that a word or phrase used in a religious context might be interpreted politically. “Where to draw the line?” asks an Asian-American pastor and worried about keeping his small congregation afloat in difficult financial times, “what does it mean to my

people when I say politics ought to be more moral or we should bring politics into our religious thinking?” Prophetic preaching while at the same time keeping the collection plates full poses a dilemma, and one many clergy understand.

Progressive and Religious. Tension arises for some when juxtaposing the words “progressive” and “religious.” “Religion cannot be contained by any one label,” a Latina, rather progressive in her views, told us. Plus, “progressive” is a broad descriptor including those who are primarily motivated politically and less so by faith. “I’m sick of hearing Christian fundamentalist, Tea Party people with their narrow-minded, right-wing politics,” a Muslim imam in Los Angeles told us, “I want to vote them out of office.” At one level his is a deep concern about his religious identity and lack of acceptance, but primarily he appears to be drawn to particular political causes. He doesn’t relate to some of the issues other religious leaders in the city are concerned about. Yet he was not at all reticent in expressing appreciation for the efforts of other people of faith. Somewhat the same reservation about conjoining “progressive” and “religious” was expressed by a moderate-minded evangelical Christian in Orange County. “We must build a broad tent,” he put it, “we don’t all have to believe the same thing.” In both cases, the concern was that to connections between faith and action not be too rigidly defined. Plus, sometimes when discussing social ethics and causes as one person said, “I learn more about what I myself believe in my own faith.” Under the broad tent, so

to speak, people often learn from one another, even change their views on occasion.

Talk about being “progressive” is often mostly about social action, about getting particular voices heard and getting people organized. “I take it to mean being theologically open and that someone is action-oriented... to get something done that should be done,” a Catholic lay person who was not highly involved in his parish commented. Similarly, a Presbyterian woman in Ventura said “it means caring about those in need and working towards justice whenever and wherever it is needed as we see today.” There were variations in how people looked upon “faith versus good deeds” but no one questioned that there must be some vital connection. Political mobilizing was thought by some to be more urgent now perhaps than in some other times, with a few pointing to the prophetic tradition of the Abrahamic faiths especially with regard to economic inequality. A Fuller Seminary student describing himself as an “evangelical progressive” spoke passionately: “This is what it really is, the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, and has to be dealt with collectively. Where are the prophets?”

For others, it was understood the religious and the political were connected but important to see them as open and exploring: as faith in search of an appropriate social expression. This posture of open-ness and emergent possibilities was summed up well by a practicing Catholic woman in Isle Vista who said “I honestly equate progressive with gospel values. Sort of like the political side of the coin, but part of the same coin as gospel values. But we have to figure just how they go together.” A few others used the word “pragmatic,” emphasizing the importance of finding that which best works in addressing a particular social concern. A Presbyterian pastor in Los Angeles trained in the Saul Alinsky tradition of community-based organizing offered the following: “The new progressive movement I am building is about being able to create space for debate, for negotiations, compromise, and effective public action – faith communities coming out of their shells.” Not interested in interfaith cooperation as customarily practiced, he wants something that reaches deeper: people building power within an urban community through networks linking churches, workers, unions, employers, and other local institutions. “All politics,” he said, “requires ongoing efforts, only way to get real and long-lasting change.” The need for breaking out of old ways of expressing concern and action, or becoming more socially connected, more skilled at negotiating, and open to finding more effective and realistic solutions to social problems was expressed by others. As one Catholic activist put it, “progressive means looking for not a conservative or liberal way to get things done, but maybe a new way that will benefit more people.”

Progressive and Pluralistic. “Progressive” was often associated with the region’s culture of pluralism. Diverse religious and spiritual communities as well as the religiously unaffiliated have all flourished here, and still do. Los Angeles, for example, is said to enjoy a “civic love of pluralism”<sup>4</sup> – a love expressed in partnerships and covenants between congregations across faith traditions. The city’s civic love of pluralism is also transnational, evident in dialogue and common causes between established traditions and newer immigrants, particularly so among Jews, Muslims, and Christians with respect to what is happening in the Middle East. “We have a pretty good sense of equality here, with some exceptions of course,” a Catholic woman in Westwood told

us, “we want to get along, which is a good progressive goal.” This sense of community amidst diversity was imaginatively described by a Methodist pastor in Hollywood: “Important to recognize, and I think people here do, that if we become isolationist in country, tribe, or culture we cannot survive. We live in tapestry, obvious in California.”

Openness to diversity and emphasis on exploring new possibilities appear to have shaped a new appreciation for “compromise” as a religious reality. People spoke of it as a possible outcome when reaching out and working with other faith groups, yet a risk they should take. If compromise is the result of genuine efforts to witness to faith and ethical values, it should not be seen as failure or an indication of a lack of serious effort. “Compromise need not be a dirty word,” a Hispanic



Photo Courtesy Progressive Christians Uniting

pastor involved in a community organization helping to find jobs and/or better-paying employment for people in East Los Angeles told us, “It’s often how progress happens, you give and take, get whatever you can and hope for the better.” And still others, less caught up in the everyday nitty-gritty of directly helping people in need, stressed that progressive-minded congregations and advocacy groups should be more assertive even if the odds for bringing about effective change are against them. In effect, they should stand up to the power brokers that perpetuate economic inequality and other problems in local communities, the nation and the world, especially corporations and large companies, the banks, the police and law enforcement agencies, and politicians; even if there is little real change at least the Goliaths will have heard from the Davids.

But the most thorough, concise and right-on description about what it means to be “progressive,” one resonating fairly closely with Jones’ perspective was voiced by a retired, yet still very active Episcopal priest:

Progressive means that we are not bound rigidly by the traditions of the past; we are respectful of those traditions but are willing to move out into the future. Progressive is not tied to literalism, whether it is theological or biblical but is a style of religion that is open-minded and innovative. Progressive means a more inclusive understanding of religious commitment. It is a deep commitment to social justice and world peace. It dares to create new expressions in both faith and ethics. It means that we don’t allow the dead hand of old tradition be the ultimate decision-maker of that which is just, appropriate, and moral. We believe that God is teaching in new ways. Progressive means having a new responsibility.

Others voiced the need to assume social responsibility, particularly those believing that faith must be lived out in social action, that social-structural change and not just charity is essential, and who hold to a vision of an open, humanly shapeable future.

## PROGRESSIVE PRIORITIES

What causes do progressive activists in the region consider most crucial at this time? Based on our research Southern California’s progressive priorities are pretty similar to those reported elsewhere for the country:<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Priorities in Southern California and the US as a whole**

Southern California <i>Progressive</i>	Nation <i>Progressive</i>	Nation <i>Conservative</i>
1. Poverty/Economic Inequality	1. Poverty	1. Abortion
2. Environment	2. Health Care	2. Same-Sex Marriage
3. Health Care	3. Environment	3. Immigration
4. Homelessness	4. Jobs/Economy	4. Poverty
5. Racial/Ethnic Discrimination	5. Iraq War	5. Jobs/Economy
6. Immigration	6. Immigration	6. Iraq War
7. Gay Rights	7. Same-Sex Marriage	7. Health Care
8. Women’s Equality	8. Abortion	8. Environment

Other issues raised in the regional study were abortion, education, veteran’s welfare, gun control, gangs, separation of church and state, torture, militarism, and national security.

For the country and Southern California alike the high priority issues are poverty, health care, and the environment. Poverty and jobs/economy were combined as a single item in the regional study, and jobs/economy comes in as fourth for the country. Jobs and economic inequality, largely structural realities must be addressed if we are to have a more equitable distribution of income, is a view that is widespread in California, and probably even more so today than when the data were collected. Asked about what is the most important of all the issues, a Jewish woman in Santa Inez put it bluntly, “Poverty – root of all,” and a Catholic man in Riverside similarly said “Poverty is the central problem.” That Californians are sensitive to this critical situation is not so surprising given the state’s high level of mortgage foreclosures, lack of adequate health coverage for many citizens, and simply the survival needs many people now face. According to a special U.S. Census report in 2011, the highest proportions of low-income families (those below the poverty level plus slightly better-off) reside in the South and the West; and within the latter California follows Arizona and New Mexico in having the highest number of families in this low-income category, now well over 1 million.<sup>6</sup>

Conservative religious activists of course support a strikingly different set of issues, almost the mirror image of those for progressive priorities. Our regional study did not examine the views of conservatives but according to the national study that Green, Jones, and Cox conducted in 2009 they give as their highest priorities abortion and same-sex marriage, and at the bottom of their list the environment and health care. Poverty, jobs, and the economy fall in the middle. That the two movements diverge so sharply in priorities indicates just how deep this ideological cleavage reaches within American life today, and one so obvious in our national politics at present.



## THE REGION'S RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

Important to understand, too, is Southern California's religious climate, intertwined of course with its political mood. Generally known is that region is more liberal in outlook than most places within the United States. It is understood as well to have a large unaffiliated, more secular constituency – estimated at 47%.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes here, particularly helpful would be to know more about the images of God that residents within the region have plus what it means to be a religious person. God images vary a great deal, plus vary according to specific social issues. People's conceptions of a religious person tell us a lot about their ideologies, the religious and the political typically meshing together. To get an overall picture, we make use of a series of items that were placed on a state-wide survey.<sup>8</sup>

### God Images

As would be expected, Californians like most Americans favor a personal image of God but the figure is less than one might have expected – only 53%. Thirty-one percent think of God as an impersonal force, a view held particularly by men and younger respondents. Following is the percentage breakdown for the religious constituencies:

**Figure 2: Images of God as either *Personal* or *Impersonal***

	Personal	Impersonal
White Evangelical	81	14
White Mainline Protestant	55	33
Black Protestant	69	25
Latino Protestant	68	26
White Catholic	62	27
Latino Catholic	55	41
Unaffiliated	25	36

Source: California Survey, Public Religion Research, 2010

While all religious constituencies favor personal images, the proportions claiming impersonal conceptions are quite sizable, especially for Latino Catholics and white mainline Protestants. The combined personal and impersonal percentages do not total to 100% because some people were unsure of how best to picture god or did not believe at all. The highly-

educated in particular – 27% in fact – were among the latter.



Photo Courtesy Progressive Christians Uniting

**Figure 3: Images of God as *Father, Mother, Judge, and Liberator***

Percentage "likely."

	Father	Mother	Judge	Liberator
White Evangelical	97	23	85	71
White Mainline Protestant	74	26	66	49
Black Protestant	96	46	84	66
Latino Protestant	94	43	86	85
White Catholic	86	33	69	54
Latino Catholic	93	60	77	83
Unaffiliated	61	31	43	45

Source: California Survey, Public Religion Research, 2010

Figure 3 shows a breakdown of more specific God imageries for the large religious constituencies:

- As would be expected, father images prevail but are more common for white evangelicals (97%), black Protestants (96%), and Latino Protestants (94%). Least likely to hold these images among religious constituencies, yet still predominately, are white mainline Protestants (74%). Even for the unaffiliated sector this is the most common image (61%).
- Mother images are much less common but very prevalent among Latino Catholics (60%), black Protestants (46%), and Latino Protestants (43%).
- Imageries of God as a judge are held by large proportions of Latino Protestants (86%), white evangelical Protestants (85%), and black Protestants (84%). Within the white mainline Protestant and white Catholic communities the proportions are less although still the majority view. Only with the unaffiliated is there a majority not inclined to favor this image.
- God as liberator is far more common among Latino Protestants (85%), black Protestants (66%), and Catholic Latinos (54%), indicative of the influence of liberation theology within these sectors. White mainline Protestants and white Catholics are much less likely to endorse this image.

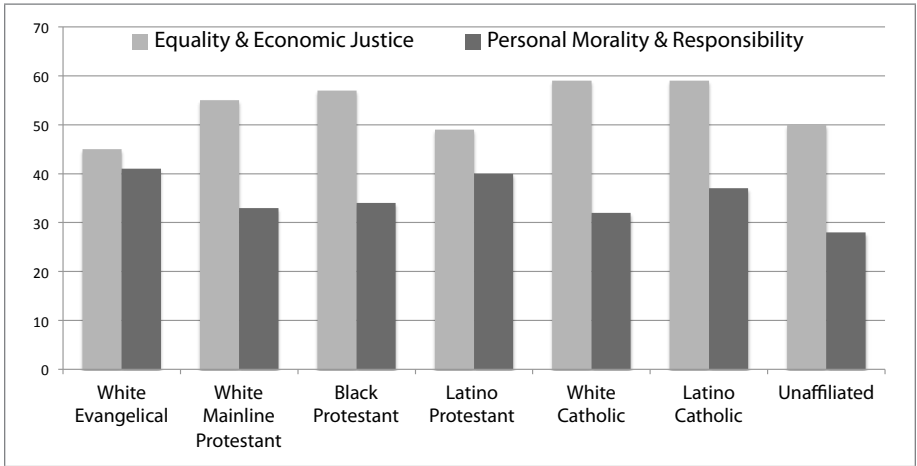
California is not unusual in these patterns. God images for the country generally point to much the same. White Catholics and white mainline Protestants hold more benevolent, supportive images than strong authoritative images. More than a majority of black Protestants and white evangelical Protestants claim father images. The West Coast does differ in having a large proportion of "Distant God" believers, or those having non-anthropomorphic images, plus those claiming to be agnostics or atheists.<sup>9</sup>

A breakdown of God imageries by political parties in the California study shows that Democrats are more open than Republicans to mother images (44% to 26%) and liberation images (67% to 59%). Alternatively, Republicans are more prone than Democrats to hold father images (86% to 77%) and judge images (76% to 65%). They are also more likely to favor anthropomorphic images rather than thinking of God as an impersonal force. While these differences by political party affiliation are not huge, they are in keeping with political research suggesting that the two parties tap deep

contrasts in gender-based socialization: Democrats with a greater affinity to female-like nourishing and caring qualities, Republicans more with the patriarchal qualities of authority, control, and protection.<sup>10</sup> As might be expected, Independents fall somewhere in-between but lean slightly toward the Democrats, with regard to mother and liberator images especially.

**Figure 4: Views of a Religious Person**

Percentage saying people should focus on *Equality & Economic Justice* vs. *Personal Morality & Responsibility*



Source: California Survey, Public Religion Research, 2010

### Views on Being Religious

Figure 4 shows how people look upon the qualities best-fitting for a religious person. Respondents were asked to choose between alternative perspectives, one socially-oriented and the other more personally-oriented. The two statements were: “Religious people should focus on equality and economic issues” versus “Religious people should focus on personal morality and responsibility.” All constituencies, including the unaffiliated, favored the first statement, i.e., the more socially-minded perspective. But there were significant differences among groups. White Catholics (59%), Latino Catholics (59%), black Protestants (57%), and white mainline Protestants (55%) favored the social perspective more than did other groups. White evangelical Protestants and Latino Protestants endorsed personal morality and responsibility far more so than did the other constituencies. One will notice that the percentages do not add to 100%, the reason being that some people could not decide between the two perspectives, and chose instead either both or none.

Clearly, the major difference between progressives and conservatives is the former’s emphasis on structural change in society as the means to finding solutions to social inequities and related problems as compared with the latter’s stress upon personal faith and morality. Essentially the difference is rooted in whether one privileges a community-oriented perspective on faith and ethics, and thus calling for social responsibility which fits well with benevolent, caring images of God; or whether the individual is viewed as an independent agent with stress upon personal piety and morality, which

goes more with authoritative, more judgmental images. In each instance, there is a well-focused religious ideology. These diverse perspectives on faith and action have a long history but came into public prominence a century ago with the rise of the Social Gospel movement within American Protestantism. And with the culture wars of the past several decades the cleavages between the two have sharpened on many issues, and now extend across all the major faith traditions. As Figures 1 and 2 make clear, this religious and cultural division reaches very deep.

Differences Within Religious Constituencies

Another way of tapping the religious climate is to look at which faith traditions, or segments of them are similar in outlook with regard to what particular social issues. Well-known are the contrasts among religious communities but less known are the internal differences within them. This is particularly the case for the large, heterogeneous communities. For white Catholics, white mainline Protestants, and white evangelical Protestants – the three largest constituencies – there are significant differences between high-committed and low-committed members. We can reasonably expect that the more faithful adherents will be more exposed to, and likely influenced by church teachings and authorities in matters of faith and ethics. However, low-committed adherents with weaker ties to religious communities tend to think more independently and are more open to wider social influences.

**Figure 5: Social attributes of religious constituencies (percentage)**

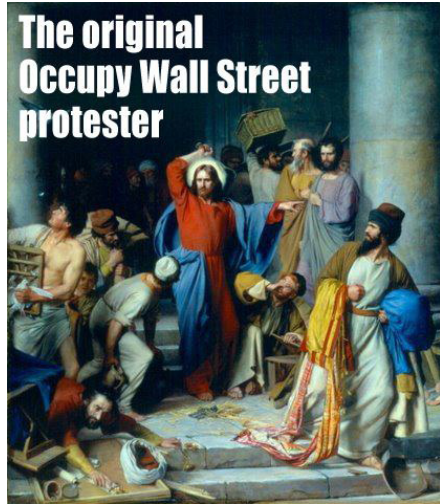
	Pro-Choice	Favor Gay Rights	Favor Helping Minorities	Favor More Welfare Funding
Evangelical Protestant				
<i>High Committed</i>	17	32	32	47
<i>Low Committed</i>	45	49	29	47
Mainline Protestant				
<i>High Committed</i>	53	57	30	54
<i>Low Committed</i>	61	77	29	43
Catholic				
<i>High Committed</i>	22	50	38	58
<i>Low Committed</i>	67	75	37	54
Black Protestant	33	49	58	65
Latino Catholic	37	62	57	62
Other Christian	63	55	34	45
Non-Christian	60	61	50	62
Unaffiliated	65	71	71	51

Source: National Surveys of Religion and Politics, 2000

To examine this possibility, we made use of data from another survey conducted some years back.<sup>11</sup> Shown in Figure 5, we see that 75% of low-committed white Catholics favored gay rights as compared to 50% of those who were high-committed. Similarly, we see that 77% of the low-committed white mainline Protestants favored these same

rights as did 57% of the high-committed; and among white evangelical Protestants the split was less but still in the same direction, 49% among the low-committed but 32% among the high-committed. How this compares with other regions is not clear, but given California's highly individualistic culture it is not surprising that views on gay rights are so split, or that those who are more deeply committed within religious communities differ so much from those on the periphery. High-commitment adherents for all three of these religious constituencies were also less prone to liberal positions on access to abortion rights and environmental protection. But interestingly, on economic issues the spread between the levels of institutional commitment is less, and the patterns reversed: those highly committed were more in favor of the progressive position on helping minorities and welfare funding, and particularly this was true for Catholics and mainline Protestants. Latino Catholics and African-American Protestants were conservative on moral issues but liberal on economic issues. Other Christians, non-Christians, and the unaffiliated were generally liberal on all issues.

Exploring further, we see that the large low-commitment sectors within the mainline Protestant and Catholic sectors occupy crucial positions for shaping public opinion. Because of their greater openness to lifestyle differences and environmental protection their views are similar to those of the smaller constituencies of "other Christians," "non-Christians," e.g., Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, plus the larger unaffiliated sector. All combined this amounts to a sizable progressive-leaning constituency – over 50 percent of southern California's population! In effect, it is a crucial swing vote that leans liberally on environmental, lifestyle and cultural issues, but allies with the more politically conservative (and more institutionally religiously committed) sector on bread-and-butter issues. Not surprisingly, religious and para-church leaders frequently find it difficult to predict just how religious communities generally will vote in election years. By overlooking this distinction in institutional religious loyalties, we fail to grasp the differing types of religious-based public influences.



Progressive Christian Internet Meme

## CHALLENGES

Several major challenges now face progressive religious activism, and not just within Southern California:

Strategizing for Change. Following upon the discussion above, faith-based activists should be sensitive to the “swing dynamic” in religiously-infused politics. Theological and ideological affinities vary with the social issues, and thus framing for mobilizing support and formulating strategies are critical. Making use of high-committed religious people to mobilize their low-commitment friends is not uncommon, a case in point being what happened with Proposition 8 on marriage in California a few years ago. Aside from the enormous amount of financial support they raised for the proposition, Catholic priests, Mormon elders, and evangelical pastors all played a huge role in galvanizing public opinion by reading letters from church authorities in congregations and/or preaching on the topic; and very importantly, they coordinated their most faithful members to help in contacting and persuading others not present in congregations, the low-committed members, to get behind the cause.<sup>12</sup>

Religious communities easily lend themselves as settings for cultivating social networks, and no doubt there will be more of it, and more of it directly aimed at political elections, moral values and ethical controversies in the year ahead. Both progressive and conservative activists are planning ahead as we approach the presidential election in 2012; indeed, evangelical Christians already have well-developed social networks and technologies making use of churches as centers for mobilizing votes in California and across the entire nation.<sup>13</sup> For progressives the challenges are greater with respect to using mainline congregations partly because they do not engage in all the tactics of combining religion and politics that conservatives do, plus as shown above mobilizing the high-committed on many progressive issues is a challenge. And the low-committed members do not have the same access to the ready-built institutional structure available for assisting with social causes that do the high-committed.

Beyond Politics? With all due respect to the practical consideration above about social and political strategizing, we must ask the question: should religion’s public presence be defined simply in political terms? Since the rise of the culture wars of the past quarter-century, mass mailings, NGOs, the media, and the Internet have emerged as the dominant means of religious-based mobilizing. Yet all too often what we observe in



Image Courtesy  
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace

these media are selective religious teachings, symbols, and images used for legitimating social causes, whether liberal or conservative. “Politics is always and everywhere the framework,” writes sociologist James Davison Hunter<sup>14</sup> decrying the extent to which politics has come to provide not just the venue for, but often the language of religious influence within the public arena. The situation is exacerbated when the religious camps see themselves as locked into a conflict with one another in a war of persuasion. Representations of faith traditions become truncated and shaped to fit partisan ideologies; energies which otherwise might be channeled toward larger public audiences and with less-politicized messages get drained.

Hunter rightly calls for a rethinking of religious influence – toward what he describes as “faithful presence” – asking us to think about the influence of faith within all spheres of life, and not just the political, and to explore how to make that influence felt. By learning how to speak to and through other institutions and life-arenas, his hope is that we can all become less captive to politicized definitions of faith and ethics. Theoretically his point is well-taken, how to make this happen is far from obvious. But without some creative efforts in this direction, the progressive religious movement cannot realize its goal, or at least the goal as expressed by some within its ranks of easing the serious polarization that now exists between progressives and conservatives. And as long as the constellation of faith and politics continues as we know it today, this will not happen without a concerted effort at thinking more creatively about public faith, both as vision and social expression.

Faith – Individual and Social. Is it possible to define faith and action currently with less of an ideological split between religious progressives and conservatives? Probably not in any absolute sense since the structuralist-versus-individualist perspectives on which they differ are not reconcilable. But in actual practice, there may be ways of crafting more comprehensive approaches where the two faith-and-action systems are complimentary. Because systems as these are socially constructed in particular cultural environments, both of them are as American as they are religious: both bear the influences of the nation’s economic and political values, its notions of freedom and individualism, plus also a vision of a country once mythologized as the New Eden. Thus, despite differing emphases both are examples of what Robert Wuthnow calls “deep culture.”<sup>15</sup> As narratives they are taken-for-granted, define what is “real” for those that hold them, and for that reason often go unquestioned. Yet in a society like ours some examination of how and why we have these two strongly-opposing stories of faith and action is exactly what we need. To quote Wuthnow:

...reflective democracy requires individual and collective examination of when and how narratives tell only part of the story... We can further that endeavor by being less willing to take the conventional wisdom implied in these narratives for granted...Narratives are typically built around under-standings of balance and harmony, but these understandings are often one-sided... Reflective democracy involves analyzing background assumptions as well as addressing practical questions.<sup>16</sup>

The challenge is to shift the debate between the two ideological camps away from narrow partisanship, of who is right, in the direction of a broader reflection. We need to reflect on how each of the theological system captures emphases in faith and action that are important, but that neither on its own terms can provide the full balance and harmony to which Wuthnow refers. Obviously this is a formidable undertaking, but southern California's experience with, and rethinking of compromise in religious strategizing as a creative faith expression gives some hope.

For example, there has been some movement of evangelical Protestants joining hands with mainline Protestants, Jews, Catholics, and others in support both of ministries to AIDS victims but also of trying to gain greater public funding for medical and health research for developing better treatments. Young evangelicals are more open to homosexuality now than even a decade ago, which has helped in bringing religious constituencies closer together in dealing with gay rights.<sup>17</sup> Much the same is true with environmental protection as an issue. Especially in the case of AIDS, the differing religious strategies are complimentary, one personal care-oriented and the other social-priority oriented. Critical, too, this alliance builds upon a widely-shared common ground of humanitarian concern. The challenge is finding common ground on other issues, and thus a basis on which to build more comprehensive approaches for dealing with them. Admittedly this will not easy be easy, but we should try. This might even result in new narratives on faith and action, which would be a welcomed outcome.

All this said, there is no reason to expect any quick solutions to the huge challenges before us. Nor should religious progressives cease in what we are now doing, certainly not before we come up with better approaches. The social issues that cry out for attention are dehumanizing and extraordinarily complex, at times seemingly irresolvable, but this is no time to abandon ship. What is important is that we go about our work with a sense of social responsibility and not be deterred by the enormity of the challenges before us, but also without becoming too self-assured or so preoccupied with what we are doing that we fail to consider other ways of witnessing to our own core convictions. If there is a distinctive quality that describes "grace in Southern California," a quality that stands out above all, let this be it.





## Endnotes

- 1 Robert P. Jones, *Progressive and Religious: How Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist Leaders Are Moving Beyond the Culture Wars and Transforming American Public Life* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 171-191.
- 2 Jim Wallis, *Sojourners/Call to Renewal*, Interview, September 11, 2007.
- 3 See Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 29.
- 4 John B. Orr, Donald E. Miller, Wade Clark Roof, and J. Gordon Melton, "Politics of the Spirit: Religion and Multiethnicity in Los Angeles," University of Southern California, 1994, 9-15.
- 5 We interviewed religious activists and received responses online about priorities, 87 people in total. It is impossible to compare our data in any strict sense with the national since the latter was carried out in 2009 and ours from 2009 to 2011. For the national data, see John C. Green, Robert P. Jones, and Daniel Cox, "Faithful, Engaged, and Divergent: A Comparative Portrait of Conservative and Progressive Religious Activists in the 2008 Election and Beyond," (Washington, D.C.: Public Religion Research Institute, Inc., no date).
- 6 See [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201\\_162-57343397/census-data-half-of-u.s-poor-or-low-income/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57343397/census-data-half-of-u.s-poor-or-low-income/)
- 7 Estimates of the religiously unaffiliated can be deceiving. Affiliation is based on the reporting of religious institutions which may or may not be accurate. Moreover, the unaffiliated may be religious but not formally a member of a religious congregation. The figure reported here comes from the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Survey compiled by the Glenmary Research Center.
- 8 This random telephone-dial survey of 2801 respondents was conducted by Public Religion Research Institute in Washington, D.C., June 14-30, 2010. Ideally the data would be limited to southern California, but a state-wide survey was our only option. According to an earlier survey, 59% of southern Californians belong to a religious community as compared to 54% for the state as a whole. Both Latino Catholics and evangelical Protestants have larger populations within the southern region. See the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Survey compiled by the Glenmary Research Center. The breakdown in the survey by religious group: white evangelicals, 333; white mainline Protestant, 405; Black Protestant, 382; Latino Protestant, 375; white Catholic, 271; Latino Catholic, 420; Other Christian, 317; Unaffiliated, 584; Other, 264. Some constituencies were over-sampled in order to get a sufficient number of respondents.
- 9 See Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America's Four Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.
- 10 *Ibid.* 201, note 7. For a theological interpretation, see Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew* (Harper San Francisco, 1997), Part II.

- 11 More correctly, the survey covered California, Nevada, and Hawaii. However, California accounts for 91.3 percent of that total population and thus the estimates are not significantly off the mark. It is impossible to break out the California population as a separate sample. The primary source of data was the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Survey compiled by the Glenmary Research Center. Additional data especially on African-Americans was estimated from 1990 reports. For a full methodological explanation, go to <http://www.religionatlas.org>. These data were shown earlier in Wade Clark Roof, "Religion in the Pacific Region: Demographic Patterns," in Wade Clark Roof and Mark Silk, (eds), *Religion and Public Life: Pacific Region* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2005), 50-55.
- 12 See the statement issued by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on "Morality and Personal Freedom," <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/california-and-same-sex-marriage>  
For Catholic fund-raising, strategizing, and building an alliance with Mormons, see [http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-11-10/news/17126022\\_1\\_catholics-mormons-field-poll](http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-11-10/news/17126022_1_catholics-mormons-field-poll)
- 13 See "Pastors Heed A Political Calling," *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 2011, p.A1 and A22-23. The point of the article is to say that pastors more than ever are now being trained in skills of political engagement and by making use of sophisticated technological operations to reach their church members, in hopes of unleashing an "army" of voters to shape the GOP elections in 2012.
- 14 *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 168. His analysis of the reduction of the religious to the political is well-developed and appropriately argued. So too is his general call for a "faithful presence" although his use of biblical quotes for describing it reflects his own conservative religious bias.
- 15 See his *American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts to be a Better Nation Fall Short* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 16 *Ibid.*, 225.
- 17 See Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Rachel Laser, "Committed to Availability, Conflicted about Morality: What the Millennial Generation Tells Us about the Future of the Abortion Debate and the Culture Wars," (Washington, D.C.: Public Religion Research Institute, Inc., No Date).

# APPENDIX: Major Progressive Religious Organizations

## Classification

Some organizations/communities overlap categories. Main criterion for classification is how the groups frame their primary mission to the public. Southern California is defined as the area mainly between Santa Barbara and San Diego, the coastal region where the great majority of the population is found. Some organizations are national in scope but listed because they were cited to us as helpful.

## I. Faith-based Resource Organizations

### **Progressive Buddhism – [www.progressivebuddhism.com](http://www.progressivebuddhism.com)**

A small operation seeking to integrate Buddhist teachings with modern life and addresses social issues as expressions of human suffering. Resources available for local Buddhist communities.

### **Muslim Political Affairs Council – [www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org)**

Located in Los Angeles (and Washington, DC) it informs and shapes public opinion and policy regarding Muslims in the US. It is also committed to developing leaders with the purpose of enhancing the political and civic participation of American Muslims.

### **Progressive Christianity – [www.tpc.org](http://www.tpc.org)**

An educational and coordinating agency in Los Angeles (USC) providing resources to religious groups, liturgical and textual aids, and sponsors an annual “Pluralism Sunday” for churches. Strong emphasis on religious inclusiveness.

### **Islamic Society of North America – [www.isna.com](http://www.isna.com)**

Has served Muslims of this continent for well over forty years. Aside from building bridges of understanding and cooperation within the diversity that is Islam in America, ISNA is now playing a pivotal role in extending bridges to include all people of faith within North America.

### **Protestants for the Common Good – [www.thecommongood.org](http://www.thecommongood.org)**

With headquarters in Washington, DC, this organization is widely cited by mainline Protestants in southern California as a resource for materials and commentary, a center for conferences, and a coordinating agency for mobilizing people of faith to become involved in public life.

### **Public Religion Research – [www.publicreligion.org](http://www.publicreligion.org)**

A nonprofit, nonpartisan research and education organization dedicated to work at the intersection of religion and politics, located in Washington, D.C.

## II. Advocacy

### **People of Faith Against the Death Penalty – [www.pfadp.org](http://www.pfadp.org)**

Coordinates an effort at getting people to pledge to help repeal the death penalty.

### **Homeboy Industries – [www.homeboy-industries.org](http://www.homeboy-industries.org)**

Assists at-risk and formerly gang-involved youth to become productive members of society through job placement, training and education.

### **Office of Justice and Peace – Los Angeles Archdiocese – [www.la-archdiocese.org](http://www.la-archdiocese.org)**

Advances Roman Catholic teachings on social justice affirming life and human dignity.

### **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-LA) – [www.ca.cair.com](http://www.ca.cair.com)**

Leading Muslim civil rights organization, seeks to build coalitions for greater justice and a peaceful world.

### **Interfaith Power and Light – [www.interfaithpowerandlight.org](http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org)**

Encourages people and congregations to be better stewards of creation and respond to global warming through energy conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy.

**Ecumenical Council of Pasadena – [www.ecpac.net/ecumenical.htm](http://www.ecpac.net/ecumenical.htm)**

Mission is to alleviate the effects of poverty, to encourage self sufficiency through the collective efforts of congregations, individuals and community organizations and to promote mutual support, understanding and collaboration within faith communities of Pasadena.

**Jewish World Watch – [www.jewishworldwatch.org](http://www.jewishworldwatch.org)**

A hands-on leader in the fight against genocide and mass atrocities, engaging individuals and communities to take local actions that produce powerful global results.

**Progressive Jewish Alliance – [www.pjalliance.org](http://www.pjalliance.org)**

Educates, advocates and organizes on issues of peace, equality, diversity and justice, as a progressive voice in the Jewish community and a Jewish voice in the larger progressive community.

**Progressive Christians Uniting – [www.progressivechristiansuniting.org](http://www.progressivechristiansuniting.org)**

Seeks to inspire and equip individuals and communities for courageous leadership, to grow more deeply in faith, find strength in one another, and build a prophetic movement for social justice.

**Progressive Muslim Union – [pmunadebate.blogspot.com/](http://pmunadebate.blogspot.com/)**

Activists and/or scholars who have been part of the shaping and articulation of a global progressive Islamic discourse for a number of years. Emphasis is on a progressive Islam that is discovered in actual engagement with other Muslims and those who live on the margins of society.

**Community Alliance – [www.fresnoalliance.com](http://www.fresnoalliance.com)**

A coordinating agency devoted to exploring relationships of religion and politics, housing and inequality, police and community, war and peace issues.

**Bloom in the Desert Ministry – [www.bloominthedesert.org](http://www.bloominthedesert.org)**

A ministry and advocacy of UCC members and United Methodists devoted mainly to equality in marriage, gay rights, and assistance to prisoners.

**Muslims for Progressive Values – [www.mpvusa.org](http://www.mpvusa.org)**

An organization guided by ten principles rooted in Islam, including social equality, separation of religion and state, freedom of speech, women's rights, gay rights, and critical analysis and interpretation.

**Council on American-Islamic Relations – [www.cair-california.org](http://www.cair-california.org)**

Global organization to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

**Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice – [www.clueca.org](http://www.clueca.org)**

Primary goals are to share resources, create effective statewide collaboration on public policy, provide hands-on technical assistance, training and capacity-building to interfaith worker justice groups throughout California.

**California Faith for Equality – [cafaithforequality.org](http://cafaithforequality.org)**

An organization committed to equality for LGBT people.

**Jews on First! The Jewish Response to Attack on the First Amendment – [www.jewsonfirst.org](http://www.jewsonfirst.org)**

Addresses violations of the First Amendment in the Jewish experience in the US, especially reproductive rights, LGBT rights, patriarchy, evangelization of Jews, and church-state separation.

**United Religions Initiative – [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)**

A global organization addressing war and peace, the victims of war, especially children and their needs in 78 countries. Promotes grass-roots change, particularly social, economic and environmental crises that contribute to poverty.

**Presbyterian Voices for Justice – [www.witherspoonsociety.org](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org)**

A national group, but many Presbyterians “concur” with this initiative in support of sustained gender equality, racial reconciliation, full human rights for LGBT persons, economic justice, environmental wholeness, an end to war and all forms of violence, and a justice-loving shalom over all the earth.

**Progressive Christian Study Group of San Diego – [www.progiansd.net](http://www.progiansd.net)**

An ecumenical group that meets to discuss progressive Christian ideas, and critically re-examine traditionally held belief systems.

**Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) – [www.cluela.org](http://www.cluela.org)**

Founded in 1996, it is one of the oldest interfaith worker justice organizations in the country. CLUE LA's mission is to bring together clergy and lay leaders of all faiths to join low-wage workers in their struggles for justice.

**Southern California Committee on Parliament of World Religions – [www.sccpwr.org](http://www.sccpwr.org)**

A large, very active organization marshalling religious and spiritual groups across the region in support of programs addressing religious conflict, hunger, discrimination, human rights, children, women, and seemingly any major emergency that comes up in region, country, and world.

**Fellowship of Reconciliation – [www.forusa.org](http://www.forusa.org)**

Composed of women and men who recognize the essential unity of all creation and have joined together to explore the power of love and truth for resolving human conflict. Opposed to war, the Fellowship has insisted there must be a just and peaceful world community, with full dignity and freedom for every human being.

**Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace – [www.icujp.org](http://www.icujp.org)**

Activities promote critical examination of the costs of violence and war at home and in the world from a faith perspective. Focus is upon human rights, international law and the use of peaceful means in the resolution of conflicts.

**Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice in San Diego County – [www.onlinecpi.org](http://www.onlinecpi.org)**

Devoted exclusively to addressing working people's rights, work-based discrimination, and shrinking job opportunities. It is particularly sensitive to the needs of the poor and the marginalized.

**Interreligious Council of Southern California – [www.irc-socal.org](http://www.irc-socal.org)**

Mission is to promote mutual understanding and respect among religions; share concerns for problems of the community, nation, and the world; address issues that impact the entire religious community of Southern California; provide moral leadership on mutually agreed upon issues that effect the community.

**Orange County Interfaith Coalition for the Environment – [www.ocice.org](http://www.ocice.org)**

An interfaith group that develops program and activities, particularly for young people to engage one another across faith lines in care of the environment.

**California Partnership – [www.california-partnership.org](http://www.california-partnership.org)**

Not specifically a religious organization, but a resource and coordinating agency for many religious participants. Focus is on advocating for programs and policies that reduce and end poverty; concerns also for electoral power in low-income communities, the state budget and health care for all.

**Progressive LA – [www.laprogressive.com/progressive-issues/religious-left](http://www.laprogressive.com/progressive-issues/religious-left)**

Addresses political issues of all kinds, but occasionally focuses upon the religious left. Many religious people in Los Angeles look to this organization in shaping their own views about community needs.

**Voice of the Faithful – [www.votf.org/Parish\\_Voice/west.html](http://www.votf.org/Parish_Voice/west.html)**

A Catholic movement addressing the crisis of pedophilia by priests in the Catholic Church and seeks reform within the church.

### III. Networks

**Allies Gather – [www.alliesgather.org](http://www.alliesgather.org)**

An informal network connecting and nurturing agents of change and particularly to end racism and heterosexism in communities of faith.

**The Beatitudes Society – [www.beatitudessociety.org](http://www.beatitudessociety.org)**

Develops and sustains emerging Christian leaders as they build a progressive network for justice, compassion and peace as expressed in the Beatitudes. The organization works closely with seminarians.

**CA Faith for Equality – [www.cafaithforequality.org](http://www.cafaithforequality.org)**

Educates, supports and mobilizes California's faith communities to promote equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and to safeguard religious freedom.

**Covenant Network of Presbyterians – [www.covnetpres.org](http://www.covnetpres.org)**

San Francisco-based but well-known in southern California, a broad-based, national group of clergy and lay leaders working for a church that is simultaneously faithful, just, and whole. Seeks to articulate the church's historic, progressive vision and works for a fully inclusive church.

**Network of Spiritual Progressives – [www.spiritualprogressives.org](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org)**

An interfaith movement that welcomes "spiritual but not religious" and secular people as well. Focused largely on justice and identity issues.

**Southern California Interfaith Network – [www.interspirit.net/scin.cfm](http://www.interspirit.net/scin.cfm)**

An emerging new initiative, designed to support understanding among faith groups in the Southern California area, and to connect interfaith work in our region to what is going on nationally and internationally.

**The Liberal Christian Network – [www.hostdiva.com/liberalchristians](http://www.hostdiva.com/liberalchristians)**

Aim is to gather the best that the internet has to offer in progressive religion research and publishing and cross-reference it for ease of use. Site provides many links to other progressive sites, short abstracts of articles, sermons, and various types of resources. Addresses concerns of both Progressive Christians and Progressive Religion (meaning across faith traditions).

**Catholics Online – [www.catholic.org/national/national\\_story.php?id=25182](http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=25182)**

A large network of Catholics provided with commentary and resources, including occasional stories of progressive religious interpretation. A source of inspiration for progressive-minded Catholics.

## IV. Centers

**Islamic Center of Southern California – [www.icsonline.org](http://www.icsonline.org)**

An independent organization whose purpose is to practice and share the values of Islam in the United States of America by providing religious, educational and social facilities for members of the community. The emergence of an American Muslim identity is its prime goal.

**Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry – [www.clgs.org](http://www.clgs.org)**

Seeks to advance the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and to transform faith communities and the wider society by taking a leading role in shaping a new public discourse on religion and sexuality through education, research, community building and advocacy.

**Center for Religion and Civic Culture at University of Southern California – [crcc.usc.edu](http://crcc.usc.edu)**

Founded in 1996 to create, translate, and disseminate scholarship on the civic role of religion in a globalizing world. A major coordinating agency in Los Angeles, it is committed to action research with a local focus, scholarship across disciplinary boundaries, creating resources for researchers, policy-makers, communities and thought-leaders, and exploring religion's global reach.

**Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life – [www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu](http://www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu)**

Established in 2002, it addresses major ethical issues as they interact with religion and politics. Much attention is given to religious pluralism, human rights, religion and politics as well as topics of special importance to California such as immigration and media.

**Center for the Study of Religion, UCLA – [www.religion.ucla.edu](http://www.religion.ucla.edu)**

Focused primarily on the academic study of religion, the center holds conferences and programs with attention to religion and societal issues.

**Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration – [csii.usc.edu](http://csii.usc.edu)**

A center at USC devoted to studies of immigration as a social process, particularly in southern California. Religion is one of many factors examined in this process.

## V. Interfaith Dialogue and Action

### **Abrahamic Faith Peacemaking – [www.abrahamicfaithpeacemaking.com](http://www.abrahamicfaithpeacemaking.com)**

Dedicated to exploring possibilities of peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians in conflict situations, local, national, and global.

### **Inter-religious Council of Southern California – [www.irc-socal.org/faith/](http://www.irc-socal.org/faith/)**

Mission is to promote mutual understanding and respect among religions, share concerns for problems of the community, nation, and the world, address issues that impact the entire religious community of Southern California, and provide moral leadership on mutually agreed upon issues that effect the community.

### **California Council of Churches – [www.calchurches.org/about\\_us4.html](http://www.calchurches.org/about_us4.html)**

Organized in 1913, it educates faith communities to pursue justice through study and service. Its program, California Church IMPACT, seeks to empower and mobilizing people of faith to be effective advocates in the public policy processes of government.

### **The Christian-Muslim Consultative Group – [www.thecmcg.org](http://www.thecmcg.org)**

Promotes learning, dialogue and advocacy among its representative members and the wider communities of faith through lectures, workshops, press releases, youth gatherings, and other activities.

### **Muslim Bridges – [www.muslimbridges.org](http://www.muslimbridges.org)**

Seeks to build bridges through dialogue in search of peace and to misperceptions of Islam and American Muslims in particular.

### **University Religious Conference at UCLA – [www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/urcfriend](http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/urcfriend)**

A leader in the interfaith discussion since 1928. Seeks to challenge the community to redefine interfaith life from beyond tolerance to true coexistence. Focus is mainly on the many religious, spiritual groups and affiliates on the UCLA campus and in the local community.

### **The Rabbi Steven B. Jacobs Progressive Faith Foundation – [www.progressivefaithfoundation.org](http://www.progressivefaithfoundation.org)**

Committed to advancing interfaith acceptance in public life, particularly in education and funding community programs.

## Interfaith Councils

**Huntington Beach – 714-846-3359**

**North Orange County – 714-970-2771**

**Pomona Valley – 909-622-3806**

**San Diego – 619-238-0609**

**Inland Valley – 909-391-4882**

**San Ferdinand Valley – 818-718-6460**

**Ventura – 805-983-0157**

**Valley – [www.vic-la.org](http://www.vic-la.org)**

**Los Angeles – [www.losangelescouncilofchurches.org](http://www.losangelescouncilofchurches.org)**

**Ventura County Interfaith Community – [www.timhelton.com/VCIC](http://www.timhelton.com/VCIC)**

**Garden Grove, Stanton and Westminster – [www.urbandharma.org/gginterfaith](http://www.urbandharma.org/gginterfaith)**

**Newport-Mesa-Irvine – [www.nmiinterfaith.org](http://www.nmiinterfaith.org)**

**Campus Interfaith of CSU Channel Islands – [www.campusinterfaith.org](http://www.campusinterfaith.org)**

**Interfaith Initiative of Santa Barbara County – [www.interfaithinitiativesbc.org](http://www.interfaithinitiativesbc.org)**

Promotes interfaith understanding and cooperative activities, in regard especially to homelessness and affordable housing.



## VI. Select Parishes, Temples, Mosques, Congregations

### **All Saints Episcopal Church, Pasadena – [www.allsaints-pas.org](http://www.allsaints-pas.org)**

The large flagship Episcopal Church known for its social outreach and commitment to social justice; it undertakes a huge variety of programs, and has its own Office of Community Outreach coordinating its activities.

### **IKAR – [www.ikar-la.org](http://www.ikar-la.org)**

A Jewish spiritual community that stands at the intersection of spirituality and social justice. Describes itself as fusing piety and hutzpah.

### **First Unitarian-Universalist Church of San Diego – [www.firstUUsandiego.org](http://www.firstUUsandiego.org)**

Gives attention to social issues in lectures and outreach programs.

### **First Congregational Church of Long Beach – [www.firstchurchlb.org](http://www.firstchurchlb.org)**

Self-characterized as “a liberal church, welcoming of all, passionately committed to social justice.”

### **Claremont United Methodist Church – [www.claremontumc.org](http://www.claremontumc.org)**

Seeks creative transformation in the world, and of individual hearts.

### **St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Long Beach – [www.stlukeslb.org](http://www.stlukeslb.org)**

Predominately Hispanic congregation, works closely with the First Congregational Church of Long Beach in joint projects.

### **Trinity Episcopal Church – [www.trinitysb.org](http://www.trinitysb.org)**

“Open heart, open mind, open doors.” Perhaps the strongest social-justice church in Santa Barbara, particularly with regard to LGBT issues.

### **Temple Isaiah – [www.templeisaiah.com](http://www.templeisaiah.com)**

Describes itself as a sacred community (Reform), with many gates through which to enter the center. Seek to heal a broken world and to address social injustice.

### **B’nai David-Judea – [www.bnaidavid.com](http://www.bnaidavid.com)**

An Orthodox Jewish community committed to women’s equality within Judaism.

### **Catholic Church of the Beatitudes – [www.beatitudes-sb.org](http://www.beatitudes-sb.org)**

An inclusive, welcoming faith community in Santa Barbara with a Roman Catholic woman as priest.

### **Namaste Church of the Vineyard of Temecula – [www.namastechurch.org](http://www.namastechurch.org)**

Mission statement: “Progress by definition means “to move forward”. Concerned especially with the need to revise thinking about religion.

### **Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center – [www.pjtc.net](http://www.pjtc.net)**

Its Social Action and Community Relations Committee works to increase awareness of social problems and encourage members to help in finding solutions. Temple members work with Pasadena’s Union Station for the homeless, and with Project Isaiah which collects non-perishable food and clothing for distribution to charitable organizations.

### **First Congregational Church of Long Beach – [www.firstchurchlb.org](http://www.firstchurchlb.org)**

Mission is to work for the inclusion of and justice for, all people, regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity or national origin, or any other particular element of a person’s total humanity.

### **Saddleback Church – [www.Saddleback.com](http://www.Saddleback.com)**

Pastor is the well-known, moderate-minded evangelical, Rick Warren. Church known for the PEACE Plan: Promote Reconciliation, Equip Servant Leaders, Assist the Poor, Care for the Sick, Educate the Next Generation. Not a progressive church as that term is usually defined, but regarded as such among conservative evangelicals; some more liberal churches work with Saddleback on environmental and AIDS outreach.

**St. Bedes Parish – [www.stbedesla.org](http://www.stbedesla.org)**

Deeply committed to social outreach; prepares and serves lunch at the Outpatient AIDS Clinic at the Los Angeles County-USC Hospital; collects food for the food shelf at the St. Joseph Center in Venice; works with the Neighborhood Youth Association, an Episcopal institution working with at-risk children in Venice & Mar Vista.

**Irvine United Congregational Church – [www.iucc.org](http://www.iucc.org)**

Seeks growth in spirit, fellowship, and number by becoming a more culturally diverse congregation; by strengthening capacity to serve neighbors and the community; works to transform individual lives and the community.

**Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara – [www.ussb.org](http://www.ussb.org)**

A vibrant and welcoming community dedicated to the search for truth and meaning; known for its work on furthering the causes of justice, tolerance and love; for alleviating suffering of all kinds.

**First United Methodist Church of Santa Barbara – [www.fumcsb.org](http://www.fumcsb.org)**

Mission is to provide a welcoming place that encompasses multiple generations, gender and sexual preference diversity, and where efforts are made to connect commitments of faith to acts of mercy, social justice, and compassion.

**Bel Air Presbyterian Church – [www.belairpres.org](http://www.belairpres.org)**

A church that takes the call to be “city changers” seriously, one that reaches to the poor and the rich and across racial, economic, and denominational lines.

**United University Church – [www.uniteduniversitychurch.org](http://www.uniteduniversitychurch.org)**

Merger of First Presbyterian Church and University United Methodist Church near USC; describes itself as an “inclusive, peace, jubilee, sanctuary, progressive church.”

**Santa Monica Catholic Church – [www.stmonica.net](http://www.stmonica.net)**

Has made the news as a Catholic Parish with the activities of its Social Justice Committee.

**St. Francis Universal Catholic Church – [www.stfrancisucc.org](http://www.stfrancisucc.org)**

An open, affirming religious community in San Diego comprised of many ex-Catholics and former members of other Christian congregations.

**St. Alban’s Liberal Catholic Church – 818-761-3970**

North Hollywood, California. Similar to the St. Francis Church described above.

**Temple Israel of Hollywood – [www.tioh.org](http://www.tioh.org)**

Reform congregation known for its many social justice programs, with attention recently to health care reform, loss of jobs, and economic inequality.



