

Common Ground kicks off to serve communities

By *Irma Widjojo/Times-Herald staff writer*

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More than 1,000 delegates from 15 charter religious, nonprofit and labor institutions celebrate the founding of 'Common Ground,' a broad-based, non-partisan alliance on Sunday in the St. Patrick-St. Vincent's High School gym. Balbina Vara of St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church in Vallejo was one of several people who spoke about problems. ((Chris Riley/Times-Herald))

An enthusiastic crowd of about 1,500 people filled a Vallejo high school gym Sunday afternoon to welcome a new multi-county organization to the community.

Common Ground was introduced at the convention, which was attended by members of its 15 member institutions, other allied organizations, and Napa and Solano counties and state elected officials.

The broad-based organization is made of religious and non-profit organizations from Vallejo, Benicia, Fairfield, American Canyon and Napa, who "have the capacity to act on the issues in our community," said co-chairman Todd Bertani, of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Fairfield.

"Individually we can only do so much, collectively we can so do much more," said Renie Stamm-Kirk of Community Congregational Church, Benicia. "We're intertwined in one community."

In the works for a few years now, Common Ground will tackle a variety of issues from homelessness, to immigration, to education, and many more.

"It depends on the member institution to bring the issue up to (Common Ground)," said Julie Webb of Napa Valley Lutheran Church, Napa.



The 15 members pay dues, and meet monthly, Webb said. The dues ensure that the organization is self sustaining, and thus far, it has raised \$25,430, Bertani said.

Common Ground is also part of the Industrial Areas Foundation's Sacramento Valley Organizing Community, a larger nonprofit that works to develop local groups.

During Sunday's convention held in the St. Vincent St. Patrick High School gymnasium, delegates from the member institutions shared personal stories about the issues their communities face.

For example, a woman told the gathering about a time when she was almost deported after getting reported by her employer, while another told a story about when her 13-year-old son had a rifle pointed at his chest by his peer.

Meetings and other events have been planned for the next few months, including a neighborhood and school safety meeting in October, and a school and neighborhood walk in November.

Elected officials also voiced their support to the organization during the Sunday convention.

For more information about Common Ground, email info@commongroundiafca.org or call (916) 494-1603, or visit facebook.com/CommonGroundIAFCA.

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