

Recruiting through Faith

Last September, the Alameda County Social Services Agency introduced their Faith Initiative. The Faith Initiative is an effort to assist the Alameda County Faith community in recruiting foster parents. Currently there are over 2600 children in the foster care system; African American children represent more than 60% of the population. The Faith Initiative was designed to help the Department of Children and Family Services to increase the awareness about the needs of children and youth in the child welfare system services and increase the number of foster homes in Alameda County. It is also intended to provide Alameda County residents with the support necessary to become a foster or adoptive family. Unfortunately, over the last 10 years the number of foster homes in Alameda County has greatly declined from over one thousand homes to barely two hundred and fifty. Several factors contribute to the decline of foster homes such as the rising cost of living in the Bay Area, foster parents getting older and retiring and the lack of resources for many foster parents.

To support the initiative the Social Services Agency has convened an advisory group, the Alameda County Faith Advisory Council (FAC). The goal of the Faith Advisory Council and the Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services (a department within the Social Services Agency) is to recruit 400 county licensed Foster Family Homes for Alameda County children and youth by 2009. The FAC works with the Department of Children and Family Service's Division Director and staff in collaboration with the Social Services Agency Director to review foster family related policies, programs, and develop strategies to achieve the following objectives:

- **Increase awareness** about the critical need for culturally diverse foster family homes in Alameda County.
- **Enable faith leaders** to actively recruit potential foster parents through their community work and congregations.
- **Collaborate with the Social Services Agency** to surmount obstacles to foster family recruitment, licensing, and retention.

The Faith Advisory Council (FAC) is an open membership group comprised of diverse faith leaders, child advocates, and supporters of child welfare improvement in Alameda County. The FAC membership is made up of over 45 faith based leaders from all denominations. The FAC is grounded in the belief that every child deserves a family; and was launched with the leadership, guidance, and compassion of the faith community.

The Faith Advisory Council hopes to achieve their goals by uniting community groups, fellowships of member denominations, churches, organizations, and individuals in a call to action that will help strengthen the capacity of the Department of Children and Family Services, to improve outcomes for children and youth in Alameda County.

On June 27th, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors will formally launch the Faith Initiative through out the county. It is our hope that this effort will bring together congregations of all denominations of the faith community to rally around our children. The foster care system was not set up to be a long term child rearing program. However, the children who experience foster

care, they need loving, supportive quality foster homes. If the program is to achieve its goal of recruiting 400 new foster homes by 2009 people from all sectors of our communities must step up to the plate. If you are interested in becoming a foster parent or getting involved in the activities of the Faith Initiative or the Faith Advisory Council contact Reverend Raymond E. Lankford, FAC Administrator at 510.858.7292 or email: Rlankforde@aol.com