



Phone: (916) 447-7959
info@picocalifornia.org
www.picocalifornia.org
FB/IG/Twitter: @picocalifornia



LOVE, JUSTICE, AND POWER: A 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dearest faith and spiritual leaders, organizers, supporters and siblings of PICO California:

We give thanks for the many ways in which Our Creator was at work in our lives, in our communities, and in our network in the Year 2022, as we labor together to shine a light of compassion, justice, and hope in our troubled world.

Many of you know that, back in May, I became a first time parent of a baby named Francisco. The magical and mysterious experience of becoming a parent has made me feel two emotions deeply:

Awe and urgency.

Awe at the miracle of life, at the sacredness and fragility of life.

Urgency because some days, it feels as though we are running out of time. Urgency to make California, so full of injustice and exclusion, into a more loving, a more safe, a more equitable place for all creation.

California is ground zero in the enormous struggle over the battles for who matters, who belongs, and who deserves a share of the immense wealth produced by the working families of our state. Today, a family renting a two bedroom apartment in most regions of our state pays an average of \$2,300 per month, with rents rising everywhere.

\$2,300 a month requires someone to earn \$61.50 per hour to afford that rent. The problem is, the average wage for a worker is between \$16 per hour and \$25 per hour. That means working 3-4 full time jobs to afford the rent. If you work 4 jobs at 40 hours a week, that leaves you 8 hours per

week to sleep. Not 8 hours per day, but 8 hours a week to sleep. Black and Latino families are 4 times more likely to be rent burdened than our White sisters, brothers, and siblings. Formerly incarcerated and undocumented immigrants face the greatest barriers to finding housing, which is why over 60% of our unhoused siblings are formerly incarcerated.

Sister Xi is an African-American Muslim community leader in the PICO network and a single mother. She works full time at a Walmart, and picks up other jobs to pay the rent. Many of her Walmart co-workers live in their cars and pay a membership at Planet Fitness so that they can shower and go to work. They often get ticketed and towed for violating overnight camping laws.



PICO California has a vision for a radically different quality of life for Sister Xi and all families in our communities. Our vision is for an economy that includes, that protects, that nurtures, rather than an economy that exploits and extracts. We believe that, only by linking arms across difference and across our network, will we build enough power to overcome the opposition of those enriching themselves off of the status quo.

We are organizing to pass laws that keep families in their homes and safe from evictions, that increase the availability of affordable homes, and that put more money in the pockets of families through things like guaranteed incomes. We are organizing to transform our criminal justice system, to save lives from gun violence, to welcome and promote our immigrant siblings, to expand access to quality healthcare, to care for our common home.



I am in awe of the community leaders across PICO California who not only have a vision for a radically inclusive and equitable communities, but who every day devote their hearts, minds, hands, and feet to building it through the beautiful ministry of Community Organizing.

The great Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, once said,

“People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don’t even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes. All is a miracle.”

It is a miracle to wake up each day with an opportunity to look into the eyes of our neighbor, hear their story with our ears, invite them to dream with us, and to walk with us towards a future where every person has a roof over their heads, a job that treats them with respect, and the confidence that they will always have enough to live with dignity, no matter what life brings.

Joseph Tomás Mckellar
Executive Director

A YEAR OF RENEWAL



In July PICO California moved our entire network infrastructure into a new multi-entity organization, fully accountable to the grassroots communities we serve. Our 2022 Renewal Initiative progress includes:

- Forming an independent California-based 501c3 organization, establishing a new Board of Directors, and creating a new compensation structure in partnership with network affiliates to increase greater racial and gender equity.
- Launching our School of Faith & Power to exponentially increase the number of leaders we develop.
- Improving data-driven decision making via dashboards for organizers and directors to spot trends, strengths and weaknesses, and strategic opportunities for growth.
- Doubling down on digital organizing, nearly quadrupling our number of individual donors and tripling our email database to exponentially increase our fundraising, leadership formation, and civic engagement efforts.



- Beginning a network-wide planning process for a large, statewide mobilization (“Love, Justice, & Power Forum”) with over 2,000 grassroots faith and spiritual leaders from across the PICO California network and our allies in 2023 intended to influence the power and narrative terrain of public policy priorities in city councils, county boards of supervisors, the state legislature, and the ballot.
- Developing a blueprint for PICO California as a Spiritual & Political Home. We will create regular spiritual rituals that invite new members, create a sense of broader community, provide nourishment to our individual life journeys, awaken us to our shared humanity, shape values and worldviews, and motivate us to act together for racial and economic justice.
- Hiring a Chief Organizational Officer, a Chief Operations Officer, a Campaigns Director, a Director of Communications, and a Senior Political Advisor to provide key leadership to our network leadership and newly-established organizational infrastructure.
- Making significant contributions towards growing the power of our broader organizing ecosystem by deepening and expanding our alliances with grassroots organizing, labor, academic, policy, and narrative institutions; by taking leadership in joint campaigns rooted in health equity; and through the creation of shared power building infrastructure, including the Million Voters Project, the California I-Center, PIVOT, and the Democracy & Power Innovation Fund, amongst others.

SCHOOL OF FAITH AND POWER

This year we launched a leadership formation institute for grassroots leaders, clergy, tribal elders, and organizers to build long-term organizing power to impact issues important to Californians.

We executed a shared network strategy that included:



- 1.** Establishing a monthly Learning Leads Cohort for 29 network executive directors and lead organizers who are committed to investing in staff development.
- 2.** Creating a Directors Cohort for deep leadership coaching and fellowship amongst executive directors.
- 3.** Recruiting and assigning experienced coaches to each of nine local affiliates.
- 4.** Launching a series of Knowledge Seminars with partners like Dr. Manuel Pastor of USC's Equity Research Institute and Nsé Ufot of the New Georgia Project.



In August we held a weeklong statewide leadership training at a retreat center in Los Altos with 106 grassroots leaders, clergy, tribal elders, and organizers from across the state - our first in-person training since the start of the pandemic.

With our newly-created 90-page leadership guide, trainers in our School of Faith and Power taught participants how to tell their story of self and connect it to a larger story of Us, the lifecycle of community organizing, how to build relationships, how to exercise and sustain power building efforts, and the structural forces at play in the California story.

By 2026, we will have trained 25,000 new grassroots leaders and community organizers and have a publicly accessible online learning platform with a library of trainings on leadership development and community organizing, available as standalone courses and as supplements for in-person programming.

MILLION VOTERS PROJECT

In early November we wrapped up an incredible six week nonpartisan voter engagement campaign, led by 40 Voter Fellows who spoke to our “devout and diverse” audience across the state about the importance of their voice and their vote.

With the Million Voters Project (MVP) we ran the largest coordinated voter education program in California, smashing our goals by contacting:

140,909

LOW-PROPENSITY
VOTERS AND VOTERS OF
COLOR

80,796

SUPPORTERS IDENTIFIED

39,539

ACTIVISTS OPTED-IN FOR
FUTURE ORGANIZING



The Million Voters project ran the largest coordinated voter education program in California.

36

Coalition Partners Ran Program

16

California Counties

9

Languages For Outreach

427

Voter Outreach Organizers

FAITH VOTES

- PICO California spoke on the phone with 27,293 faith and spiritually-rooted Californians about housing as a basic human right, an economy that works for everyone - not just big industry and the wealthy - and the value of joining together across our differences to effect change in our communities.
- Reached 309,456 people online to amplify our on-the-ground organizing, utilizing a digital tool kit created in partnership with MVP.
- Hosted 18 non-partisan sheriff, city council, school board, mayoral, and county supervisor candidate forums - attended by over two thousand people - where we presented stories of directly impacted people, outlined our policy and structural change priorities, and won commitments from candidates to work for racial and economic justice on behalf of families and communities.
- Knocked on 33,250 doors to educate our neighbors about the ways in which our elected officials can prevent unsafe living conditions, harassment, and unjust evictions.



We are especially thankful for the stories our Fellows told about their own growth and the transformation of the voters they spoke with:



"I had a voter who didn't want to engage and shared with me that his father was in hospice care right before he was about to hang up. I asked if I could pray for his father and family, and he agreed. He was so moved by that prayer that he decided to answer all questions and thanked me. God can do some wonderful things! It made me feel impactful!"



In 2022 we conducted a polling and messaging research project with several thousand Californians to identify our core audience: who and where they are, what they believe, and what comprises their overall ideology. We then used these data to create a unique model of a “PICO California Voter.” We are building a base that extends beyond our current congregational network to the millions of Californians for whom faith and spirituality is a key part of their decision to participate in public life.

“One young lady had no idea where to go or how to vote. I was able to give her that information and she was so grateful and was able to elaborate on how she felt we could make the community better by coming together.”

SPOTLIGHT ON: HOUSING

This year, the PICO California network went all-in on housing justice as not only an equity issue but an existential issue for Californians. Through multiple local tenant organizing campaigns, dozens of public actions and testimonies, hundreds of meetings with city, county, and state legislators, and tens of thousands of conversations with voters, we helped achieve extended renter protections in cities and counties across the state, and numerous local victories to protect and build the power of tenants, preserve existing and produce new affordable housing, and ensure that people experiencing homelessness have a pathway to housing and dignity.

PICO California held 50 local and regional public actions with over 5,000 Californians, aligned with our Economy of Belonging platform: family sustaining housing for all, universal basic wages, restorative and immigrant justice, and care for our common home.

We advanced campaign efforts across the state to protect tenants, including expanding the right to counsel, pass just cause eviction laws, implement rental registries, start tenant unions, increase habitability, provide rent relief and eviction defense, increase affordable housing production, strengthen inclusionary zoning, leverage \$100 billion in federal and state surplus and stimulus funds, and fight for vacancy taxes and real estate sales tax to fund housing protection, preservation, and production. Here are some of the highlights.





LOS ANGELES

As a steering committee member of the Our Future Los Angeles coalition, PICO California affiliate LA Voice spent years organizing efforts to establish an agency dedicated to increasing the supply of affordable housing in LA County. In September, Governor Newsom signed a bill creating the Los Angeles County Affordable Housing Solutions Agency. Introduced by Sydney Kamlager, a State Senator representing the communities that make up the heart of LA Voice's organizing efforts, the agency will be tasked with increasing the supply of affordable housing in Los Angeles County by providing for significantly enhanced funding and technical assistance at a regional level for renter protections, affordable housing preservation, and new affordable housing production.

“The current housing system in place hasn’t done enough to support working families across the region,” said Tania Medina, a grassroots leader of LA Voice. “With LACAHSAs we know that we can do so much more.”

As a leader of the grassroots coalition United to House L.A. (ULA), LA Voice helped place and win a ballot measure that is expected to generate between \$600 million and \$1 billion annually into homelessness prevention and housing by increasing the transfer tax on property sales above \$5 million. The measure will provide a dedicated, long-term funding source for housing for people living on the streets, send emergency assistance to low-income seniors in danger of becoming homeless, and provide legal aid to renters to reduce homelessness.



“I don’t think it’s overstating it at all to call it a game changer,” said Ann Sewill, general manager of the city’s Housing Department.

FAITH VOTES is our chance to come together as one community, to exercise our power this election season, and build a Los Angeles County that respects the dignity of all people.

**FAITH
VOTES**



But that isn't the end of LA Voice's efforts to provide solutions to the affordable housing crisis. Supported by numerous public actions organized by the grassroots leaders and community organizers of LA Voice, a new bill would make it simpler for religious institutions and private universities to build affordable housing on their property. 65 congregations in the LA Voice network have committed to erecting affordable housing units on their land.

"Churches have been so amazing, helping people who are distressed," said Pastor John Oh, project manager for faith and housing at LA Voice. "This is an opportunity for congregations to think about, 'How can we help with some of the root causes of the problem and not address it at the very end?'"



FRESNO

As the expiration of renter protections put into place during the COVID-19 pandemic and wealthier home buyers fleeing overheated housing markets in the Bay Area and Los Angeles have combined to squeeze Fresno's renters, PICO California affiliate Faith in the Valley (FIV) has been at the center of the fight for a tenant right to counsel.

Months of city hall rallies, meetings with council members, a tenants union push, and tenants rights education events with a coalition of grassroots faith leaders from FIV, renters, and students from Fresno led to the creation of an Eviction Protection Program. Since the creation of the program, hundreds of Fresno renters have been able to get free legal help and avoid trial in a system that is stacked against them.





BAY AREA

The grassroots faith leaders of local affiliate Faith in Action Bay Area (FIABA) led the way in both San Francisco and San Mateo Counties to reframe the issue of housing as a central issue that defines the health of a community as a whole.

With 20,000 people living on the street, low-income elders and families struggling to stay housed, and 61,000 empty housing units being used as investment property and kept empty, in San Francisco FIABA [co-authored a ballot initiative to tax vacancies](#) to create a housing vouchers

"My hope might seem optimistic, but I believe in a San Francisco where you don't have to be a zillionaire to plan a future. I believe that San Franciscans have hearts big enough to help seniors and low-income neighbors avoid displacement. If that inconveniences the super-rich, I have a Bible full of stories to support my position."

- Reverend Victor H. Floyd, leader in
Faith in Action Bay Area



fund for low-income people and to create more affordable units in the city. Passed in the face of millions of dollars in real estate opposition, this righteous organizing fight was created and led by low-income seniors who used their grassroots power and collective voice to make a difference.

In the heart of Silicon Valley, FIABA deepened support to tenants to prevent a massive wave of evictions that would either leave people homeless or completely banish them from their community, running a major canvassing and voter engagement campaign called Redwood City Neighbors United to lift up a vision of urgent, common sense interventions that will prevent evictions and homelessness at the source – by limiting tenant harassment, neglect of building conditions, unjust evictions and eviction threats. In response, in June the city council created a citywide anti-displacement strategy focused on anti-harassment of tenants, a limit on renovation-related evictions, and establishing a right to return.



SAN DIEGO



The majority low-income senior residents of a mobile home park in San Diego County have been facing crushing rent increases of 30%. With the help of PICO California affiliate San Diego Organizing Project, the city of National City created an ordinance to protect mobile homeowners and park residents from excessive and unconscionable rent increases during the COVID-19 health crisis and the resulting economic uncertainties. The protection will apply to rent increases beginning Jan. 1, 2023 and rent will be capped at 5%.



"We are talking about our most vulnerable communities in the region and so they don't have \$100 extra or any amount extra that they would suddenly have to put towards rent...This is not just a housing issue, but this is a moral issue."

- Cielo Garat Zanella, community organizer with the San Diego Organizing Project

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

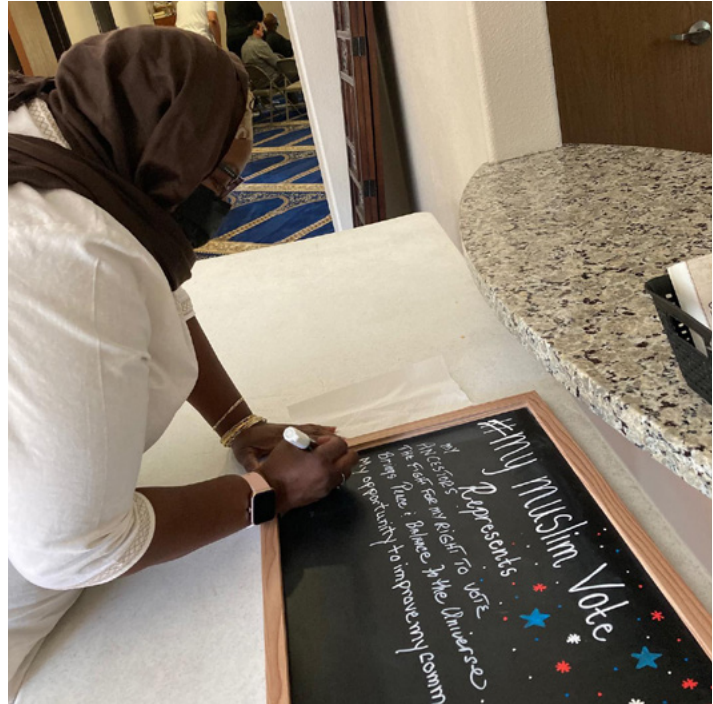


PICO California affiliate True North Organizing Network executive director Terry Supahan and tribal elders advise the state’s Indigenous Truth and Healing Council, a group of tribal leaders who are examining the state’s treatment of tribes and making recommendations for reparation. Now, California Gov. Gavin Newsom is directing more money towards Indigenous people, this time to buy back and conserve some of that stolen land — \$100 million for nearly 200 tribes. The proposal is part of Newsom’s goal to conserve 30% of the state’s land and waters by 2030, with tribal partners playing a crucial role.



SACRAMENTO

After years of grassroots organizing by people of faith to prevent the immoral policy of towing vehicles used as shelter by people experiencing homelessness until the city can establish designated sites for unhoused people to park, and countless meetings with the county Board of Supervisors, PICO California affiliate Sacramento Area Congregations Together overcame major opposition to gain two tiny home villages for people experiencing houselessness, adding 145 shed-sized private homes designed to offer greater privacy and security for the people who move in. If all four sites being considered are approved, they could add up to 375 new shelter spaces.



"There are perhaps 15,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County at this moment. So creating 375 new beds is only a start," Rick Eaton, a grassroots leader of Sacramento ACT, told supervisors at a hearing. "The status quo is thoroughly unacceptable. It's a moral outrage that people are on the streets. I'm hopeful that they'll make the right, courageous decisions."

SPOTLIGHT ON: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE



EAST BAY

PICO California affiliate Faith in Action East Bay created the Interfaith Coalition for Justice in Our Jails (ICJJ) to reduce incarceration as a response to social problems in Alameda County and to decrease harmful conditions in the Santa Rita jail. Eleven congregations in ICJJ successfully advocated for Medi-Cal reinstatement for those whose insurance is suspended or terminated due to a jail sentence.



“My faith commands action to relieve suffering and end unjust imprisonment. Incarceration of people challenged by homelessness, mental illness, or substance use disorder is unjust and oppressive. It offends my conscience that the burdens of unaffordable housing, inadequate behavioral health care, and over-incarceration fall most heavily on People of Color. As a Jew and daughter of immigrants, I cannot stand idly by.”

- Myrna Schwartz, Kehilla Synagogue

CJJ and Families Advocating for the Seriously Mentally Ill (FASMI) held a vigil and rally at the Board of Supervisors on May 24th, 2022 to protest the numbers of deaths in Alameda County Jail and the failure of the Sheriff to safeguard people while incarcerated. Over a dozen religious leaders representing diverse faiths came together to speak out and to read the names of all of those that have died in Santa Rita Jail since 2014. A letter signed by 25 clergy that included 10 demands was delivered to members of the Board of Supervisors before the rally.

INLAND EMPIRE

Youth organizing models in the Inland Empire are helping bring social change to underserved communities, according to a report by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center released in August. The report, 'Youth Organizing Efforts in the Inland Empire', takes a close look at the organizing model used by youth leaders involved with PICO California affiliate Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC) to impact decisions and policies within schools and in their community.



“Adolescents and young adults have the potential to define social policies and exercise a voice in government elections,” according to the report. “ICUC’s youth programming is a model for training young leaders to advance social justice and civic engagement in low-income, immigrant, and racially diverse communities.”



ICUC youth have been able to influence local school districts to commit to establishing mental health wellness centers and helped pass voter registration resolutions in the Coachella Valley and San Bernardino. By using organizing models based in relationship building and leadership training, the organization believes youth can have a lasting impact on organizing and civic engagement issues regionwide.



STOCKTON

For two years, the [C.A.L.L. Stockton Initiative](#), a collaboration between Faith in the Valley and partner organizations, congregations, and community residents, has been organizing for the implementation of an alternative emergency response program. In July, Stockton's city council voted unanimously to allocate \$5.7 million toward a mobile crisis intervention response pilot program. The program will consist of a team of well-trained first responders who will respond to crises involving, but not limited to, mental wellness, homelessness, and addiction.



"This program is proof that when we take part in the political process, we can shape our government and public services not just to respond to our needs, but to respond in a way that we believe is most helpful."

- Toni McNeil, Lead Organizer, Faith in the Valley



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