



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Leaders from each member organization make the pledge Sunday to better their community.

Interfaith rally aims to effect political change

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Hundreds of people from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties gathered in Salinas with one common goal: to raise their voices high in working with political leaders to solve social injustices.

Those social injustices include solving the region's housing and health-care crisis, building safe communities, improving education, facilitating immigration and providing everyone with economic opportunities.

All this, under the umbrella of the Community Organized for a Relational Power in Action. The group was formerly known as the Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors, which was formed by religious leaders of various belief systems in 2000 to encourage accountability among community members as well as their elected officials.

Robert Montague, 70, of Aptos, was among those to grab a seat at Sherwood Hall in Salinas. He was there with 25 fellow parishioners from the Resurrection Catholic Community.

"We're dedicated to trying to help people work to make the community better," he said, noting that he had never seen such a diverse group of God-fearing people come together for a cause as important as this one. "We're concerned with housing when there are so many people who can't find affordable housing."



Beach Flats resident Maria Gandara talks with Francisco Cerna in the section reserved for Family Resources Network of Santa Cruz County.

He said his group also is concerned about the lack of money for public schools and the program cuts being made to help the state balance its budget deficit.

"We're seeking solutions that benefit everyone," Montague said. "It's all part of the gospel where we're told to reach out and take care of our poor and disadvantaged."

A number of elected dignitaries were also there to show their support, including Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel; Assemblyman Simon Salinas, D-Salinas; Santa Cruz's City Council and mayor; and three members from Watsonville's City Council.

The crowd was a jubilant bunch, vowing to get into the communities to create change for the better for

all who need it after hearing inspirational tales from their peers and religious leaders in both English and Spanish.

One speaker said that when the organization was formed three years ago, someone told him they thought the idea wasn't worth a hill of beans.

The speaker went on to tell a tale about beans that almost sunk a ship because they had gotten enough water on them to cause them to expand and nearly burst a hole in the cargo hold.

"Well, we are those beans," the speaker said, noting the power of many.

COPA

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