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BUILDING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

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GRANTMAKING CONSULTING PROGRAM

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Religious Funding

Many foundations do not fund in the area of religion for one reason or another. They point out that the category 'religion' receives the lion's share of the philanthropic dollar at 43% (the next highest category is education at 14%) and some foundations are worried about proselytizing by religious grantees.

The Marin Community Foundation has moved where few community foundations have gone. It has hired an ordained minister to be the program officer for its Religion, Ethics, & Conscience program which has a \$1 million annual budget.

Within the next year this foundation expects to be at \$1 billion in assets behind the New York and Chicago Community Foundations.

The following article was contributed by Rev. Linda Compton, Program Officer at the Marin Community Foundation. www.marincf.org

Given that information is not knowledge, and knowledge is certainly not wisdom, being more purposeful about engaging in an exploration of these issues within a multi-faith, multi-cultural enterprise can have tremendous individual and community benefit.

The Marin Community Foundation (MCF) has a program area entitled, RELIGION, ETHICS AND CONSCIENCE. Initially called the Religion program area, MCF's priority in this area is consistent with the Last Will and Testament of the Foundation's foremost donor, Mrs. Beryl H. Buck, a compassionate philanthropist and woman of deep faith. Over the past 13 years, since the creation of the Marin Community Foundation, nearly one million dollars per year has been awarded in the areas of "Faith and Spiritual Exploration and Development," "Interfaith, Interdenominational and Cross-Cultural Cooperation," and "Leadership Development."

After more than a decade of successful and effective grantmaking, these goals were expanded to include "Ethical Exploration" and "Renewal." Just recently, the program area title was augmented to highlight the expanded focus: Religion, Ethics and Conscience. The new title captures a fuller sense of inclusion and identifies not only persons of faith, but persons of conscience as well. Marin is a county blessed with a rich diversity of cultures and multiple faith traditions. It is also home to many, many persons who are not affiliated with any particular tradition and do not claim membership in a congregation. Yet these individuals care deeply about issues of common concern, acknowledge the importance of community engagement, and grapple with issues of values and meaning within a social context. Thus, the newly named program area recognizes the various interests and observances, as well as the plurality of practices within our community.

Through the years, MCF has created partnerships with traditional religious institutions (such as seminaries and congregations) and a myriad of social service agencies. The Foundation has also helped provide seed monies and/or ongoing basic operating support for emerging special ministries such as the Interfaith Jail Chaplaincy, the Interfaith Homeless Chaplaincy, and Marin AIDS Interfaith Network: as well as the Marin Interfaith Council, which is a membership organization of over 40 congregations (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, et al) and 25 social service agencies, which work together on issues of common concern.

Some of the Foundation's support started in the Religion program area and as these organizations grew and developed, they began meeting goals within other program areas as well, including the Arts, Environment, Community Development and Human Needs. Two examples include Ministry of Light, a non-judgmental outreach to gays and lesbians, which evolved into a more service-oriented organization and became Spectrum Center for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns: and the Marin Interfaith Youth Outreach, which started as a group of concerned clergy, and has since become a core part of the Marin Teen Center which offers a safe space for youth development, as well as educational, recreational, and various training activities.

The purpose of the Religion, Ethics and Conscience program is to support the strengthening of the community's religious and spiritual life, and to encourage exploration of spiritual values, ethical principles, and matters of conscience.

When the varying (yet compatible) aspects of different faith perspectives are shared, when respectful relationships are forged and fostered, and when diversity is truly honored, strong creative alliances can be formed which then become a strategic force for the common good. Given the understandable concerns about sectarianism, and the potentially divisive conflicts that can arise when divergent convictions are conveyed, the Foundation does not fund religious activities or programs that proselytize. In this way, the Foundation can support projects that further our goals and have the unique qualities that often spring from perspectives imbued with faith and conscience. We have the opportunity to fund activities that benefit the life of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and the broader community by recognizing those other dimensions of life. Given that there is *more* to each of us than any

of us knows, and because we are *more* than our five senses, our plumbing and our possessions, there is broad personal and public benefit to examining such issues. This program area acknowledges the *more* within and among each of us – as individuals in this age of information, and as citizens of a global community.

Did You Know.....? *

- ❖ As of 1995 (the latest figures available), Federal Reserve research found that the wealth of the top 1% of Americans is greater than that of the bottom 95%.
- ❖ Wealth projections through 1997 suggest that 86% of stock market gains between 1959 and 1997 went to the top 10% of households while 42% went to the most well-to-do 1%.
- ❖ Though average household income rose 10% between 1979 and 1994, 97% of that gain was claimed by the most well-to-do 20%.
- ❖ In 1973 the income of the top 20% of American families was 7.5 times that of the bottom 20%. By 1996, it was 15 times.
- ❖ Business Week reports that in 1999 top executives earned 419 times the average wage of a blue-collar worker, up from 326:1 in 1998. In 1980, the ratio was 42:1.
- ❖ In 1982, inclusion in the Forbes 400 list of richest Americans required personal wealth of \$91 million. The list then included 13 billionaires. By 1998, \$500 million was required and the list included 189 billionaires.
- ❖ The combined net worth of the Forbes 400 was \$738 billion on September 1, 1998. That's up from \$624 billion in 1997. That's an average one year increase of \$285 million per person. That works out to \$780,000 per day or \$32,500 per hour (\$541 per second).
- ❖ Microsoft CEO Bill Gates has more wealth than the bottom 45% of American households combined.
- ❖ The United Nations Development Program reported in 1998 that the world's 225 richest people now have a combined wealth of \$1 trillion. That's equal to the combined annual income of the world's 2.5 billion poorest people.

*Data compiled by Shared Capitalism Institute; Atlanta, GA. www.sharedcapitalism.org
For a more complete three-page listing of current trends, fax your request to (510) 645-1892.

Past copies of *Building Community Foundations*, Bulletin 1 (August 1992) to Bulletin 37 are available as a unit for \$20 to cover the cost of copying and mailing. Send check to:

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The Grantmaking Consulting Program offers three services:

- ◆ Three day on-site visits with extensive review of foundation procedures, extended individual sessions with the foundation board, grants committee, and staff.
- ◆ Two day training session for program officers (5 or more persons).
- ◆ Facilitating board retreats.

The services are available to foundations in Canada and the U.S.

The only cost to foundations is the consultant's room and meals if the foundation is smaller than \$8 million in assets, and travel for foundations of \$8 million +. His time is sponsored by the Packard Foundation.

Comments on The Grantmaking Consulting Program:

"As usual you stimulated everyone's thinking and inspired us to strive for greater impact in the community. We enjoyed your humor and company and look forward to our next meeting."

Gordon M. Hayes, Jr., Executive Director

The Comm. Fdn. of Herkimer & Oneida Counties

Utica, N.Y.