

DAILY REPUBLIC

By Barry Eberling

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VALLEJO — Common Ground kicked off its existence Sunday with a burst of energy as more than 1,000 people from religious, civic and nonprofit groups came together with the goal of making Solano County a better place.

How the group will harness that energy and enthusiasm in coming months remains to be seen. Making neighborhoods safer and helping homeless youths were among the issues brought up.

“We call to order the founding convention of Common Ground,” said the Rev. Tom Bertani of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Fairfield as the event started.

The crowd packed into the St. Patrick-St. Vincent High School gym cheered. It applauded speaker after speaker throughout the 1 1/2-hour presentation.

A roll call of Common Cause’s 15 member organizations came toward the beginning of the convention. Each group stood and had its delegates recognized.

“We have about 55 delegates here from a church of 320 members,” announced Alan Sklove of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church.

Kim Thomas spoke on behalf of the Children’s Network of Solano County. The nonprofit group’s mission is to improve the lives of children through education, advocacy and coordinated community services.

“We have five delegates with us today, and we are thrilled about the launch of Common Ground, because we see the power of collaboration every day,” Thomas told the crowd.

The gathering heard from the immigrant who spent years hiding in her house for fear of being deported. They heard from a senior worried about her 90-year-old friend who no longer gets rides to routine destinations because of cutbacks to state services. They heard from the youth whose family faced homelessness, a situation gave him a feeling of shame.

Solano County faces such challenges as murders and gang violence, said the Rev. Bryan Harris of Emmanuel Temple Apostolic Church of Vallejo.

“In order to meet these challenges, we must come together in Common Ground,” he said.

A number of public officials attended. Harris asked several what they thought of the convention.



Members of St. Basil the Great Catholic Church cheer as they are introduced during the founding convention of Common Ground, Sunday, in Vallejo. Common Ground is a diverse religious and non-profit organization in Solano and Napa Counties that aims to help

“Count on me. I’m on your side,” said Anna Caballero, secretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency and a member of Gov. Edmund Brown Jr.’s cabinet.

Sheriff Thomas Ferrara said many people in county jail have faced the same issues brought up at the convention — poverty, an inability to get a job, a lack of hope. He wants to work with Common Ground, he said.

County Supervisors Linda Seifert and John Vasquez voiced their support, as did Assemblyman Jim Frazier, D-Oakley. When Harris asked various officials if Common Ground could count on them, Fairfield Mayor Harry Price responded with a “yes.”

From the Fairfield-Suisun School District, soon-to-be-retired Superintendent Jacki Cottingham-Dias, incoming superintendent Kris Corey and School Board member Pat Shamanksy attended. Fairfield City Councilwoman Pam Bertani attended, as did various other public officials.

Jaime Soto, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento, addressed the crowd.

“I just want to say what a wonderful moment this is,” he said. “We are standing at a very significant threshold.”

Through charter members’ dues and other sources, Common Ground has raised about \$25,000. It has various meetings scheduled, such as one in Vallejo on neighborhood and school safety.

“Clearly – clearly – we are more than ready for action,” said Beatriz Esquivel Bockman of St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church in Vallejo. “Most importantly, we have rooted ourselves in relationships.”

A foot-stomping, chant-yelling performance by 13 youths from St. Basil the Great Catholic Church and a performance by a mariachi band kept the crowd enthused.

After the convention, Todd Bertani said an Aug. 22 meeting in Fairfield will address homeless youth issues and challenges faced by youths leaving foster care. Immigration is another issue that Common Ground plans to address, he said.

The kickoff event, the culmination of about four years of behind-the-scenes work, is over. Common Ground is moving on to its next act.

Please contact Todd Bertani at 422-4741 to find out more about Common Ground.

Reach Barry Eberling at 427-6929 or beberling@dailyrepublic.net. Follow him on Twitter at www.twitter.com/beberlingdr.