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Learn. Pray. Act.

REPEAT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGINIA INTERFAITH CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

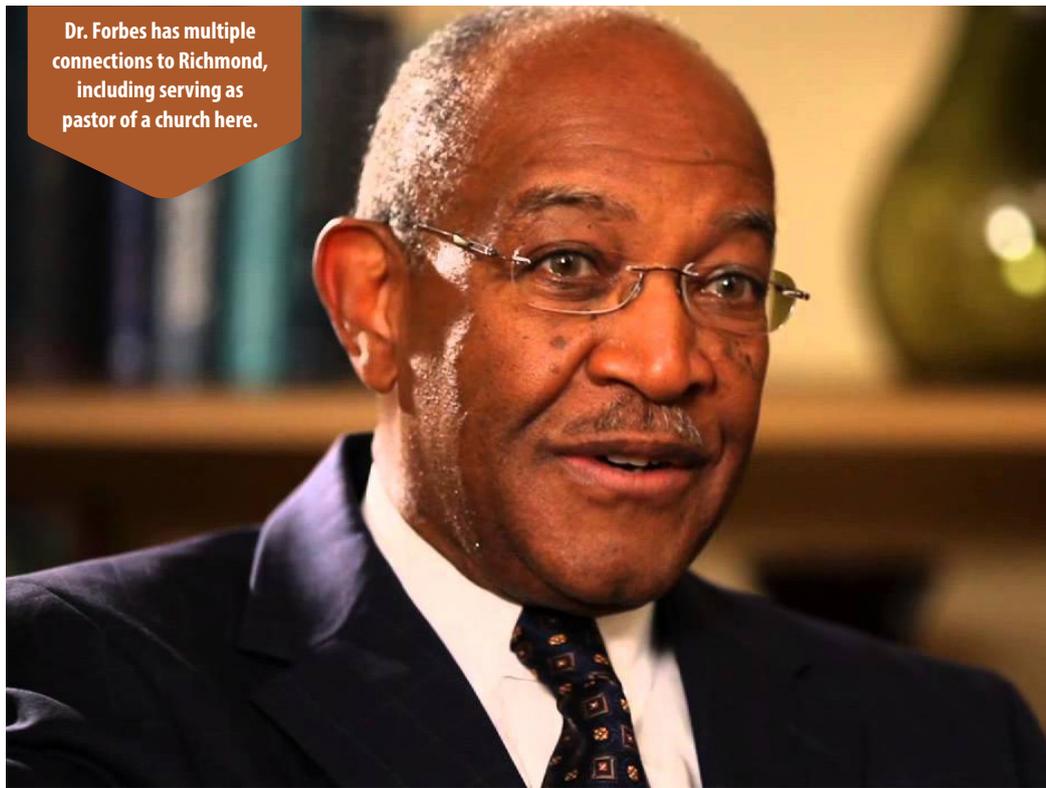
Earthbound: 1716 East Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23223

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Dr. Forbes has multiple connections to Richmond, including serving as pastor of a church here.



Agenda for 'Day for All People'

- 8:00 Registration and breakfast
- 8:30 Welcome
- 8:45 Policy Briefings
- 9:30 Transportation to General Assembly
- 10:00 Visit legislators
- 12:15 Return to VUU
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:00 Sharing visit experiences
- 1:30 Keynote Speaker — Dr. James Forbes
- 2:15 Interfaith Panel Discussion
- 3:00 Closing

Dr. James Forbes to headline Jan. 20 'Day for All People'

The Rev. Dr. James Forbes, one of the top preachers in America, will be the keynote speaker at the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy's "Day for All People" on Wednesday, Jan. 20. The day-long advocacy event will offer participants the opportunity to talk with their delegates and senators about important issues at the start of the General Assembly's 2016 session.

The event will begin at the Claude G. Perkins Living and Learning Center on the campus of Virginia Union University and then move to the General Assembly on Capitol Square. After visiting with their legislators,

participants will move back to Virginia Union University to hear Dr. Forbes speak, followed by a panel discussion.

"The theme of the day will be 'Racism Beyond the Confederate Flag,'" said the Rev. Charles Swadley, interim executive Director of the Virginia Interfaith Center. "We'll be talking about what racism means to various groups today and how policies are viewed through the lens of racism."

During the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s, Forbes participated in the sit-ins at the Woolworth's lunch

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A new year, a fresh start for Center

The new year kicks off with a big event, the “Day for All People” on Jan. 20 (see story, pg. 1). We encourage all those who support the Center to participate in this important day of advocacy. Dr. Forbes is among the best preachers/speakers around and well worth hearing.

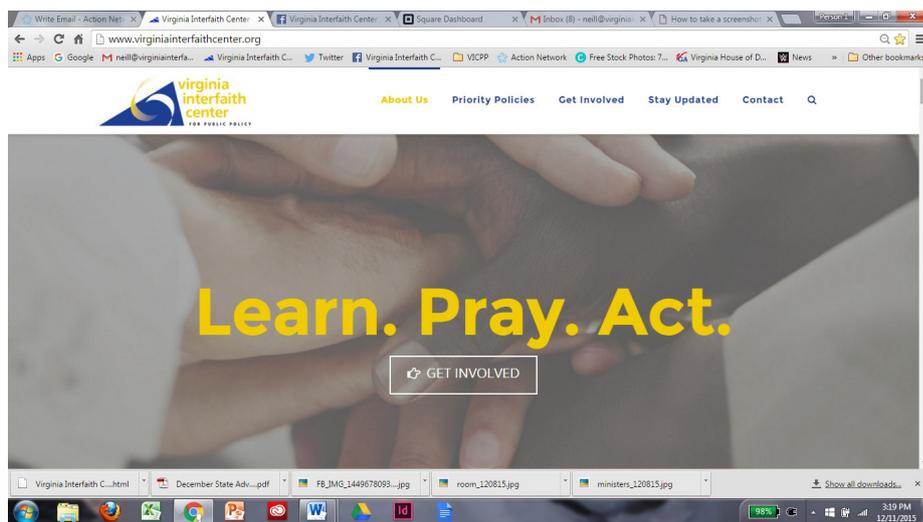
The center also begins a new year in the process of searching for a full-time executive director. The Search Committee is interviewing finalists and hope to have offered the job to someone this month.

The staff wants to extend all our heartfelt thanks to the Rev. Charles Swadley (above), our interim director, who has translated his strong passion for this ministry into an optimistic vision for the Virginia Interfaith Center, to carry it through a challenging period. Charles is part priest, cheerleader, mentor and helmsman, steering this organization toward a bright future.

We also appreciate all volunteers and donors who support this agency. Your gifts of time, talents and resources will help make this happen.

Elected officers for 2016:

Frank McKinney, President
John Copenhaver, Vice President
Davis Balderston, Secretary
Julie Swanson, Treasurer.



Redesigned website is live

Thanks to the design and IT talents of Drew Little, the new design for the Center’s website “went live” on the day of our annual meeting, Dec. 8. Visit:

<http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org>

for bolder images and a more user-friendly approach. Rather than a multitude of pages for the organization’s ministries, this new design features one main page where the visitor can scroll down and investigate different areas such as Leadership Team, Policy Priorities and how to Get Involved. There’s a section for making donations, a link to our blog

for news articles and other up-to-date information, and a place to sign up for upcoming events. The navigation bar across the top takes you to these different areas in one click.

In addition to our newly enhanced web presence, the Virginia Interfaith Center is also well represented on Facebook and Twitter, with a burgeoning presence on Instagram.



PRIORITY BRIEF: The 2016 book listing our top issues of concern is available in print and on the website.



FORBES, continued

counter at in Raleigh, N.C. He has said that one his callings was to “build a world in which our racial differences would not tear us apart.” Forbes has categorized racism not just as a sociological phenomenon but as a religious faith in which people are committed to the idea that differences among humans are more distinguishing than their similarities.”

Dr. Forbes is Senior Minister Emeritus of the Riverside Church in New York City, where he served as Senior Minister for 18 years. Most recently, Forbes has been founder and president of the Healing of the Nations Foundation, an interfaith national and global ministry for spiritual renewal and holistic health.

He is internationally known as a speaker, preacher and teacher and was named one of the 12 “most effective preachers” in the English-speaking world by Newsweek magazine, and one of the greatest black preachers by Ebony magazine. Prior to his tenure at Riverside Church, Forbes was the Harry Emerson Fosdick Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Dr. Forbes already has many Richmond connections. He was pastor at St. John’s United Holy Church of America from 1965-1973. He also worked as campus minister for Virginia Union University from 1968-1970, and earned his Clinical Pastoral Education Certificate from the Medical College of Virginia in 1968. Forbes also has among his dozen or so honorary doctorates a Doctor of Divinity from the University of Richmond.

The North Carolina native is ordained in both the American Baptist Church and the Original United Holy Church of America. Forbes has written several books and had two songs published.

The Day for All People will begin at 8 a.m. on Jan. 20 with breakfast and registration at Virginia Union University, located at 1500 N. Lombardy Street in Richmond. (The Graham Street entrance is also available.) Tickets for the day-long advocacy event are \$30, \$15 for students, which includes breakfast and lunch and transportation from the VUU campus to the General Assembly and back.

ACTION ALERTS: During the GA session we will be sending alerts to its membership on key bills and legislative issues.



Standing together with our Muslim sisters and brothers

Recently Rev. Swadley and others connected to the Center attended a gathering of clergy leaders from across Central Virginia at the Islamic Center in Bon Air.

In response to increasing Islamophobia, xenophobia, and divisive rhetoric, “Standing Together” is an initiative to bring diverse groups in Richmond together to speak out and stand with the Muslim community and others who are marginalized. “Recognizing that all of us are at risk when one group is unjustly targeted, we stand with our Muslim friends, neighbors, and colleagues, and all who are unjustly vilified as ‘the other.’ These individuals serve Virginia as citizens, teachers, police officers, medical workers, tradespersons, community leaders, mothers, and fathers. We reach out in this moment with a shared commitment to justice, compassion, love, and peace.”

The community is invited to attend another “Standing Together” gathering this Sunday, Jan. 10, at 4:00 pm at Congregation Beth Ahabah at 1109 W. Franklin St. The program, organized by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, will feature speakers, a panel discussion, and community conversations. Registration is appreciated, but not required.

For more information, you can visit the following websites:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/180407275645601/>

<http://www.inclusiveva.org/standing-together-rva/>

<http://www.inclusiveva.org/standing-together-rva/#PressConference>.



Ammar Amonette speaks, surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, at the first ‘Standing Together’ rally at the Muslim Center.

Honors handed out at Annual Meeting



Jay Speer accepted for the Virginia Poverty Law Center. Here he poses with Charles Swadley, Karen Cameron and Frank McKinney.

Annual Meeting draws more than 120 participants

About 120 people attended the Annual Meeting, held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. State Sen. John Watkins honored as VICPP's 2015 Legislator of the Year. A member of Christ the King Lutheran Church and a lawmaker since 1998, Watkins has been a strong advocate for greater access to

healthcare.

The organization's "Beacon of Light" Award was presented to the Virginia Poverty Law Center, and accepted by Executive Director Jay Speer. That organization is about to celebrate its 40th year, and has been working on various domestic issues including

healthcare.

Elected officers for 2016 are Frank McKinney, president; John Copenhaver, vice president; Davis Balderston, secretary; and Julie Swanson, treasurer.

The 2016 class of the Board of Directors includes Farhanahz Ellis, Scott Hopkins, Ali Faruk and Debra Gold Linik.



Sen. John Watkins was honored as the 2015 Legislator of the Year. Here he poses with Becky Bowers-Lanier, Mr. McKinney and Rev. Swadley.

Standing in the gap

Priority one for Virginia Consumer Voices for HealthCare during the legislative session is advocating for closing the Medicaid coverage gap.

The Affordable Care Act established a Health Insurance Marketplace for individuals, families, and small businesses to purchase insurance. To get financial help from the Marketplace...

A family of 3 has to make more than \$20,090.

An individual has to make more than \$11,770.

In most states, if someone makes an income lower than those amounts they can still get health insurance by signing up for Medicaid. But not in Virginia. Though 30 states and DC have already decided to improve access, Virginia is not providing this opportunity to many of its low-income residents.

VIRGINIA'S CURRENT MEDICAID ELIGIBILITY:

A family of 3 has to make less than \$7,656* in order for the parents to qualify



An adult without a disability or children cannot qualify, no matter how small their income

This leaves 200,000 Virginians without an option for health insurance. They don't make enough to qualify for help in the Marketplace, and they are shut out of

our Medicaid program. A total of about 400,000 would benefit from increased access to Medicaid or a Medicaid-like program.

CLOSING THE COVERAGE GAP MEANS:

- more people would get early care for preventable conditions;

- the burden of medical debts on individuals and health care providers would be lessened or eliminated;

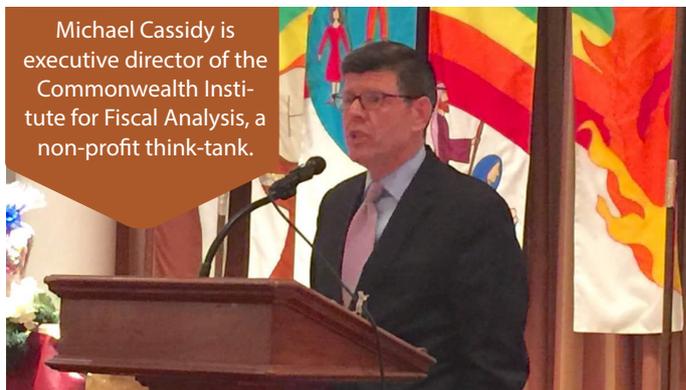
- more working parents, veterans, and students would be covered; and

- Virginia could address its current budget problems, since we'd get more of our Federal tax dollars back

Last year, Kentucky, like most of Virginia's neighboring states, decided to close its coverage gap. Their percentage of uninsured dropped 10% and is now lower than Virginia's uninsured rate. More people in Kentucky, and 29 other states, now have access to preventive care, improving the health of their workforce and reducing their health care costs. Shouldn't Virginians have the same chance to get needed health care services that can ensure their health and well being?

If you would like Virginia to close the coverage gap and benefit from our tax dollars, contact your legislator to let them know. Find your legislators by visiting <http://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>. You have the power to close the coverage gap in Virginia. There are lives on the line.

Michael Cassidy is executive director of the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, a non-profit think-tank.



'If minorities win, we win,' Cassidy says

Annual Meeting attendees heard keynote speaker Michael Cassidy, the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Institute, talk about some key issues that the organization is working on currently. One of those areas of primary focus right now is racial equality.

Cassidy told the story of a young immigrant named Yenet who came to Virginia from Mexico as a small child. She became a student at J. Sargent Reynolds Community College and then at Virginia Commonwealth University paying in-state tuition thanks to a decision by the Attorney General to extend those benefits. But a legislative decision in 2014 threatened to roll back that decision that allowed her to go to school.

"Yenet's dream is our dream," Cassidy said at the meeting, held at St. Paul's Church, "because racial equity not only concerns people of color. Racially equitable solutions improve everyone's lives. We are all affected by the same public policies – albeit in different ways. Having more educated, more engaged, more productive, healthier 'Dreamers' helps me, and my family too. Because if they win, I win. With healthier, more productive neighbors, friends, co-workers, you name it."

As for education, Cassidy reminded the audience that Virginia has slashed support for public education, especially for K-12 schools which directly impacted youngsters in the highest levels of poverty and highest number of minority students. Only a handful of states cut more deeply than Virginia, where cuts meant 11,000 fewer staff.

"And it's all happening at a time that needs are growing, not shrinking."

Cassidy touched on health care by saying Medicaid expansion is an opportunity to make progress on health care access. "This is an issue where we could cover 400,000 more if we lifted eligibility for our state Medicaid program to cover more low income folks. ... We have an opportunity but it's being rejected."

Finally, Cassidy said our current juvenile justice system is broken, and it's an issues of racial equity as well. "African-American youth make up the majority of children in prison in Virginia, even though they don't make up the majority of youth. And incarceration is expensive: In 2014, it cost \$150,994 to incarcerate one youth for one year in a juvenile correctional center, approximately \$413.68 per day."



BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL

POLICY SOLUTIONS FROM ACROSS THE U.S.

VICPP supporting efforts to end childhood hunger

The Virginia Interfaith Center, in partnership with the Virginia Poverty Law Center and Virginia Hunger Solutions, is advocating that the Legislature and the Governor together plan, craft, enact, and implement a Virginia Universal School Breakfast Act in order to provide breakfast for all children enrolled in schools throughout the Commonwealth.

Two meetings have been held — one in November and a follow-up in December — to help plan this effort. Teams have been created, one to craft a white paper and one to help present this document to the General Assembly. The Center helped host the November meeting at Virginia Union University, which drew more than 50 leaders

from different faiths and geographic locations around the Commonwealth.

Each day, more than 300,000 children across the Commonwealth of Virginia are anxious about the amount and quality of food available for them to eat. Each day, many of our children – our future leaders – arrive at school hungry and ill-prepared to learn and grow.

All school children need to have nutritious meals in order to achieve their potential. Providing the best schools and teachers alone does not ensure a child is mentally present and able to learn. A growing body of research establishes that hungry children are less able to process the information provided and less likely to be attentive to the lessons.

To his credit, Gov. Terry McAuliffe has included in his proposed two-year state spending plan money for a universal breakfast program for elementary school children. McAuliffe's Breakfast Amendment in the 2015-2016 budget includes a \$537,000 "Breakfast after the Bell" (BAB) Amendment.

Offering breakfast at no charge to all students helps remove the stigma for low-income children of participation in school breakfast and is proven to increase participation. Schools that offer breakfast free to all students in the classroom report decreases in discipline and behavior problems, visits to school nurses and tardiness; increases in student attentiveness and attendance.