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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGINIA INTERFAITH CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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Kim Bobo is new executive director

Kim Bobo, a nationally known promoter of social justice who literally wrote the book on faith-based organizing, has been selected as the new executive director for the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. She will begin work Feb. 10.

Bobo, 61, from Chicago, founded and served as the executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice, the nation's largest network of people of faith engaging in local and national actions to improve wages, benefits and conditions for workers. In that position she helped build interfaith groups and workers' centers around the nation.

She was named one of 14 "faith leaders to watch" in 2014 by the Center for American Progress, and one of Utne Reader's "50 Visionaries Who Are Changing Your World" in 2009.

"She is spiritually driven to do as much good for people as humanly possible," said Frank McKinney, Chair of the Board for the Virginia Interfaith Center. "Kim exudes both enthusiasm and compassion for her chosen work, and has proven leadership abilities. She has a charismatic personality."



Kim Bobo

Prior to Interfaith Workers Justice, she was national organizing director for Bread for the World and an instructor at the Midwest Academy, where she helped train hundreds of organizers and faith-based activists in thinking and working strategically.

Bobo is the author or co-author of several books, including: "Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid – And What We Can Do About It," the first book to document the wage theft crisis in the nation and propose practical solutions for addressing it, "Organizing for Social Change," the best-selling organizing manual in the country, and "Lives Matter: A Handbook for Christian Organizing." Bobo's most recent book,

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2016 Day for All People attracts 250 participants

The Jan. 20 "Day For All People" went well, with a large crowd of attendees who filled the new Living & Learning Center at Virginia Union University and then flooded through the corridors of power at the General Assembly.

VICPP had prepared 230 packets for participants and ran out, so attendance was something north of that figure. The crowd reflected a great diversity, in terms of race, religion and even age. There were a large group of Muslim students from a local prep school and a group of a half-dozen students on hand from Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk.

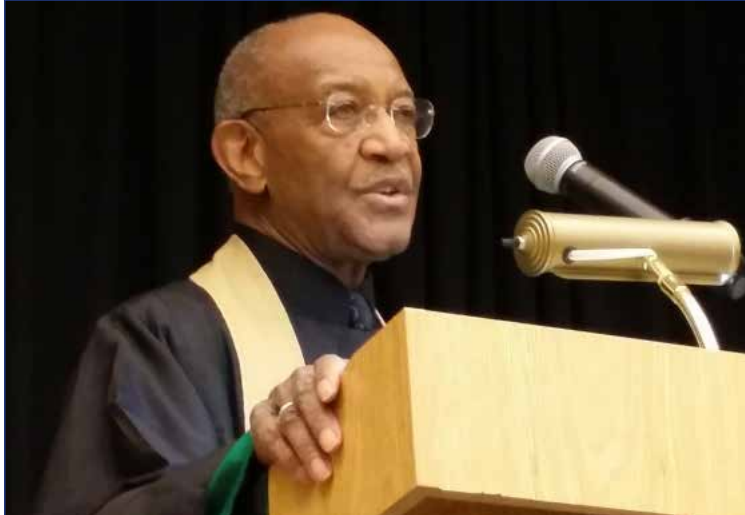
The Rev. Charles Swadley welcomed the crowd and introduced several speakers on key issues that Center was highlighting. Participants then boarded

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Taking our mission into the world



Thanks to Drew, we have published videos from the 2016 Day for All People on its YouTube channel, and with links on its website. Go to: www.youtube.com/user/VaInterfaith or www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org

And if you attended the Day for All People, we'd appreciate your feedback so we can make next year's event even better. Please go to the link below and fill out the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2016DAPSurvey>

Scenes from a Day for All People



Jan. 20 was a day with "lots of moving parts," as Charles put it, but things came together with a large crowd of participants.



ALL PEOPLE, continued

buses for Capitol Square and a two-hour window of time to meet their lawmakers. Transportation to and from the GA seemed to go very smoothly.

Returning to VUU and lunch, Swadley had audience members talk about their experience. Then the highlight of the day, hearing Dr. James Forbes, and time for comments from a group of panelists representing several different faiths.

Early analysis of the evaluation shows that people liked the facility, the food and the time available to meet with old and new friends as they took the social justice message to the General Assembly.

All in all it went well. Even our new Executive Director Kim Bobo was on hand, if a bit incognito, in town for her final interview before accepting the position.





BOBO, continued

“The Worker Center Handbook,” will be published in 2016 by ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press.

She helped coin the phrase “wage theft,” which according to StopWageTheft.org includes examples like non-payment of overtime, not giving workers their last paycheck after a worker leaves a job, not paying for all the hours worked, not paying minimum wage, and even not paying a worker at all.



Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, Kim Bobo was raised in a conservative evangelical family. In 1974, while attending Barnard College, she met a number of activist figures who influenced her vision about how to best “love your neighbor as yourself.” While at Barnard, she joined Bread for the World, a group that fuses social-justice activism and religion.

Bobo was married for 31 years to Stephen Coats, an advocate for workers in Central and South America who died unexpectedly in 2013. She has twin sons, Eric and Benjamin, who are in college. Bobo has been the choir director and an active leader at Good News Community Church (UCC) for the last 25 years.

Sign the appeal!

The Center this month has sent out a letter for Virginia faith leaders to sign asking the Commonwealth’s legislators to close the Medicaid coverage gap for nearly half-a-million state residents who cannot afford to purchase insurance. This is being framed as a moral issue. “We base this commitment on the core value that each human being has inherent dignity and that society is whole only when we care for the most vulnerable among us. Affordable and accessible healthcare is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right,” the letter states.

Expanded coverage would allow for preventive care rather than costly emergency room visits after an illness has progressed. All too often patients without health insurance delay treatment because they fear the cost; as a result, uninsured working-age Americans have a 40 percent higher death risk than their insured counterparts.

The deadline for receiving responses is Feb. 15.

An electronic version of this sign-on statement is available for distribution to any faith leaders you know. Visit <http://goo.gl/forms/SfyA17Sj5o> to add your name electronically.



'Tis the season: Beating a path to the GA

VCV staff working hard to get message before lawmakers

Work at the General Assembly ramped up sharply as the session neared "Crossover," reported Karen Cameron, with the VCV team tracking bills that called for Medicaid expansion in Virginia; changes to the Certificate Of Public Need (COPN) process for introducing certain new healthcare facilities and services in the state and actions on the Governor's budget proposals that affect healthcare.



ABOVE: Karen Cameron talks about closing the coverage gap at the State Capitol.



RIGHT: VCV Outreach Coordinator Cassandra Shaw with Melyssa Dove, a young widow with three sons who falls in the coverage gap.

Both VCV and VICPP staff went the General Assembly on Feb. 4 to help facilitate the advocacy activities of United Methodist Day as part of efforts to make access to quality, affordable healthcare a reality for all Virginians. "It's a game of inches, with much of the legislation that would put us closer to the goal line being tabled by committees," wrote Cameron. "A chorus of voices — yours, along with ours — raised to let our Delegates and Senators at the GA know that you want to make healthcare access available to all your friends and neighbors — is key getting to "win" on this."

Two House of Delegates bills were introduced to expand coverage. Del. Kenneth Plum, VA36, introduced a bill to expand Medicaid: HB797, which was tabled. Del. J. Randall Minchew, VA10, submitted a bill that would create a Virginia Health Care Access Fund, but would not expand Medicaid: HB1204, which was pulled by Del Minchew prior to introduction.

There were three bills related to COPN on one of the Health, Welfare & Institutes subcommittee's docket this week: HB1083, introduced by Del. Christopher Stolle, had our support, since it included the recommendations from a Workgroup that met five times to carefully study the COPN process to streamline and evaluate the impact of potential deregulation by service. HB1083 was tabled by the subcommittee. Two bills that would end, or substantially limit, COPN— HB689, introduced by Del. Christopher Peace, would end COPN for imaging facilities ; HB193, introduced by Del. John O'Bannon, ends COPN by setting a "sunset" timeline that eliminates most of the program by 2018. Both bills were reported out of the HWI committee, and will now move to be passed or killed by the full House.

We encourage you to contact your legislators to voice your wishes in support for Gov. Terry McAuliffe's budget proposal to expand coverage, and to let your legislators know you'd like to see COPN reformed, but reformed based on the COPN

Workgroup's recommendations. Specifically, the Governor has included the budget savings that would come as a result of pulling down Federal funds to provide care to low income Virginians that state dollars are currently used for. So let your legislator know that you want him/her to support the Governor's budget.

VCV staff also participated in HAV's advocacy day, leading small but well informed groups around the General Assembly to meet with legislators and/or their aides about the importance of closing the coverage gap. We were pleasantly surprised to find few adamantly opposed to pulling down the Federal funds available to provide affordable coverage - many shared their concerns and gave us an opportunity to share important information to help settle those concerns.

About 12.7 million people signed up for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act or had their coverage automatically renewed in the third annual open enrollment season, the Obama Administration reported on Feb. 4. More than 17 million uninsured people had gained coverage under the law because of the new public marketplaces, the expansion of Medicaid and the opportunity for young adults to stay on their parents' insurance plans until age 26.

Meanwhile the U.S. Supreme Court refused to take up a new constitutional challenge to "Obamacare," turning away an appeal that said lawmakers used flawed legislative procedures to pass the measure. Opponents of the health-care law were seeking to sway a court that has upheld core parts of the measure twice since 2012, most recently in June. In the latest case, they argued that the law violated the constitutional requirement that revenue-raising legislation start in the House before proceeding to the Senate. In declining to hear that contention, the high court all but ensured that the Affordable Care Act will remain intact through the November election.

Do not be discouraged, for our work continues

Friends and colleagues across the great Commonwealth of Virginia, it has been a distinct pleasure and honor to have served as the Interim CEO/President for the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, since April 7, 2015. Now, it is an equally satisfying pleasure to turn over the leadership to a very qualified and exceptional leader, Kim Bobo. You may find her bio online at www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org.

Everywhere I go and mention Kim, I am constantly amazed at her name recognition among justice advocates, clergy, laity, funders and coalition partners. This encourages me for a smooth and professional transition. So, I want to say thank you to Frank McKinney, chair of the Board of Directors, and to the Search Committee, led by Ali Faruk, for the extraordinary effort they made to find a dynamic qualified new Executive Director.

This year I learned something important. For many years, we had trouble identifying issues and creating bonds of purpose with the African American communities of faith. Since June 17 and the horrifically tragic experience of the murders in Charleston, SC, we have intentionally lifted up a focus looking at the multiple ways that issues gain clarity through the lens of racial equity. This has allowed us to pose this question and to ask as many different groups who are able to join us to also raise the question of what racism means today. We have asked how does poverty, lack of health care, low minimum wage, the low felony threshold of \$200, no driving privileges for undocumented immigrants, the divisive rhetoric targeting Muslims, actions that marginalize people who are different, childhood hunger where one of every six children come to school hungry, and many other issues



that impact the welfare of the most vulnerable — how do all these things contribute to racism, that keeps people enslaved to poor conditions of living and developing, preventing them from becoming productive citizens of this great land and state.

This year many events have contributed not only to an angst in Virginia but to a sense of divide and hurt across the nation, even the world, over freedom of religion, immigration and the status of refugees, especially those from Syria. The remarkable contrast in attitudes of fear on the one hand and affirmation of what is best in us on the other has led to a heartfelt synergy of multi faith communities standing together for a more inclusive and positive spirit in our communities.

There is no one easy solution to the many challenges. There is no one single winnable position that will give us ease in the midst of the chaos in the highly charged political realm. Yet, there is a renewed interest, commitment and even passion to see new avenues of solidarity with those who are vulnerable and challenged among us. At our Day For All People of Faith at Virginia Union University, we heard the clarion call from Dr. James Forbes not to be “discouraged.” He called for us to see the linkage of brothers and sisters through the Joseph story in Genesis that brings hope for all who have fallen into the pit of despair and need restoration and reconciliation.

The days ahead will be days of new leadership, new ideas, dynamic possibilities of creating alliances and developing strategies that will push us forward and challenge us to become more than what we can imagine. As I have meditated frequently at the place known as Lumpkin’s Jail, also nicknamed “Hell’s Half Acre,” not more than three blocks from our office, I realized that the impossible became transformed into something encouraging, when Lumpkin’s jail — where a quarter of million human beings passed through — changed into a school classroom for former enslaved persons. Then this unimagined reality became known as “God’s Half Acre.”

We may seem to be losing a lot of battles to ignorance, to xenophobia, to bigotry, to those intoxicated with power and wrapped in the cloths of greed, but we know that the final chapter of the story is more hopeful. It is that history that transformation is deeply rooted in our being, calling forth the best to become the change agents of a broken and uncaring world so that we all are one in peace. That is what will make us strong and the community secure. We know that. We will never give up on this reality.

Blessings on the work of the Virginia Interfaith Center and on all of you for giving your support and your good works, with gratitude, I am confident in the future endeavors of the Center under Kim's leadership.

—Charles Swadley