

April 2017

Volume 2, No. 2



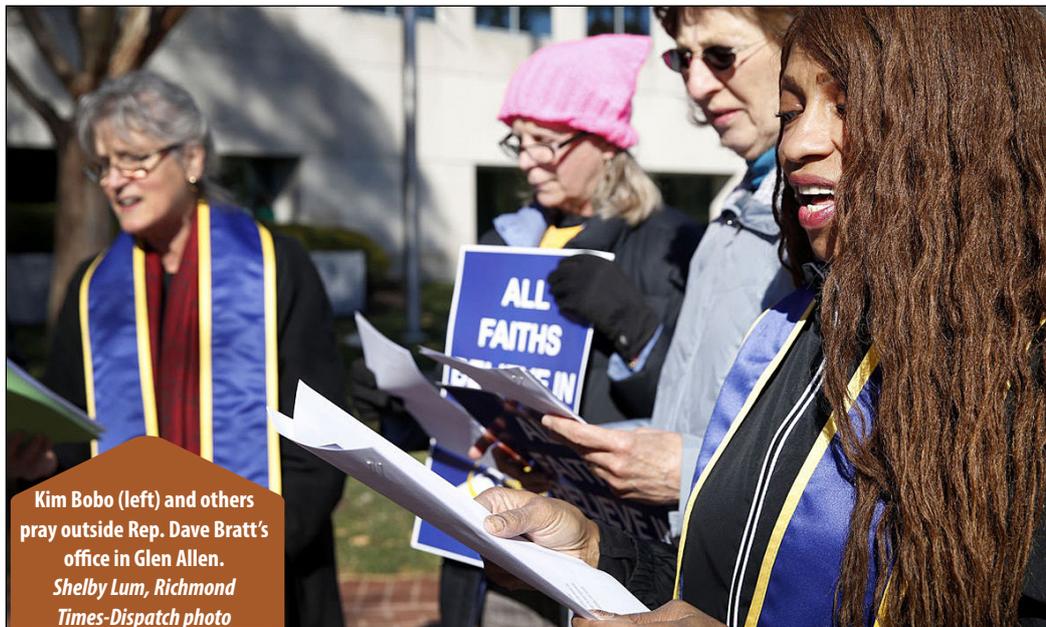
# Learn. Pray. Act.

# REPEAT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGINIA INTERFAITH CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
Earthbound: 1716 East Franklin Street, Richmond, VA 23223  
Virtual: [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org)

## Contents

- Healthcare expansion ..... 2
- 'Witness at the Capitol'..... 3
- General Assembly roundup .3
- To be a Sanctuary ..... 4
- Melting the ICE..... 5
- Faith Advocacy Partners ..... 6
- Chapter news ..... 7
- Day for All People 2017 ..... 8
- Students involvement ..... 9
- Interfaith Seders ..... 10
- Wage theft..... 11
- Driver's Licenses ..... 11
- Calendar ..... 12
- Honoring congregations.... 12



Kim Bobo (left) and others pray outside Rep. Dave Bratt's office in Glen Allen. *Shelby Lum, Richmond Times-Dispatch photo*

## The Power of Prayer

### Healthcare replacement bill disappears after VICPP's prayer vigils

office of Rep. Dave Brat, two Republicans of who have publicly said they will vote against the replacement legislation.

Despite chilly temperatures and high winds, each gathering attracted about 15 people, who prayed for the Representatives and the work of the Congress in general.

**PRAYER is continued on page 10**

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy organized prayer vigils at local offices of members of Virginia's Republican Congressional delegation in advance of a scheduled vote on a replacement plan for the Affordable Care Act. The vote was delayed a day and then pulled.

Vigils were held simultaneously at the Mechanicsville office of Rep. Rob Wittman and at the Glen Allen



Residents from different towns and different faiths pray outside the office of U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman in Mechanicsville. *Neill Caldwell photo*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**COMMUNITY FORUM ON HEALTHCARE**  
Wednesday, April 19 — 7 p.m.  
Frick Conference Center, Fredericksburg

**INTERFAITH WELCOMING SEDER**  
Wednesday, April 26 — 6:30 p.m.  
Wesley Memorial UMC, Richmond

**INTERFAITH WELCOMING SEDER**  
Sunday, April 30 — 3 p.m.  
Geshner Jewish Day School, Fairfax

**THE PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH**  
Saturday, April 29 — 11 a.m.  
Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington

**MAY DAY OF ACTION**  
Monday, May 1 — 10:30 a.m.  
Abner Clay Park, Richmond

[More details on page 13]

# IT'S BACK!

## Healthcare expansion has not gone away completely

In its healthcare efforts, VICPP was Virginia's leading grassroots advocacy organization in 2016 supporting expanding health care for low-income families. VICPP produced a Congregational Toolkit, organized a press conference in the Capitol, organized dozens of meetings with Delegates and Senators, organized people to work on city/town/country resolutions calling on the General Assembly to expand healthcare and provided a faith voice on the issue.

Health insurance statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that the rate of uninsured fell last year in 47 states, including Virginia.

In this year's General Assembly, VICPP supported efforts to expand healthcare for mental health and substance abuse services in Virginia. Several strong bills were approved this year.

During the April 5 session of the General Assembly, a new joint subcommittee was created to examine healthcare expansion. Members of that committee and their locations are: **Sen. Emmett Hanger Jr., R-Augusta; Sen. Siobhan Dunnavant, R-Henrico; Sen. Janet Howell, D-Fairfax; Sen. George Barker, D-Fairfax; Del. Steve Landes, R-Augusta; Del. Chris Jones, R-Suffolk; and Del. John O'Bannon, R-Henrico; Del. Matt James, D-Portsmouth.**

As the *Times-Dispatch* reported "Republican opponents left open the option of finding other ways to 'close the coverage gap' for uninsured Virginians in impending discussions by a new joint legislative subcommittee."

"We need to do it in a fiscally responsible way that doesn't bust the budget," Landes said.

Jill Hankin, a health attorney with the Virginia Poverty Law Center, said "Del. O'Bannon made a similar comment in his remarks. **This sounds like a small (but important) shift in the Republican's steadfast opposition to Medicaid expansion over the past four-plus years.** The new joint subcommittee will be in a position to evaluate ways Virginia could move forward to expansion coverage with a Medicaid 'waiver' that would have unique features for the state."

Executive Director Kim Bobo hopes the Center supporters can help members of the General Assembly realize the local constituent support that exists to close Virginia's healthcare coverage gap.

For more information, visit [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

# Helping 400,000 Virginians get their healthcare insurance

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy worked hard in 2016 to convince the General Assembly to close the healthcare coverage gap and draw down the federal Medicaid dollars available to Virginia, which would allow 400,000 neighbors to get health coverage and bring in \$4 million a day into the Commonwealth.

Here's how you and your congregation can help:

As an **individual**, you can:

- Write letters to your Delegate and your Senator urging them to support healthcare expansion. Visit <http://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov> to find the names of your Delegate and Senator, then visit [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org) for a sample letter.

- Make sure you are registered to vote. Visit <https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation> to register.



- Attend any town hall meetings your Delegate or Senator organize and ask questions about what the Delegate or Senator is doing to make sure that Virginians have affordable healthcare. Be sure to look at VICPP fact

sheets before you go.

- Ask friends and family members who "fall in the gap" to share their stories. Currently, Virginia has one of the most restrictive Medicaid programs in the nation. Approximately 230,000 of these Virginians earn too little to qualify for subsidies under the Affordable Care Act. We need these Virginians to tell their stories to the public and to your Delegate and Senator. The Center will videotape people's stories. Contact Neill Caldwell at [Neill@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:Neill@virginiainterfaithcenter.org) or 804-658-3956.

Also, be sure to encourage those who fall in the gap to share their stories with the elected leaders in town hall forums and individual meetings with the legislators.

As a **congregation**, you can:

- Organize a letter-writing time to send personal letters to your Delegates and Senators. (Some congregations have members in multiple districts.) Visit [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org) to get ideas on how to organize a letter writing time.

- Invite your Delegate and Senator to talk with the congregation or your adult group about what he or she is going to do to help close the coverage gap.

- Make sure everyone in your congregation is registered to vote and goes to the polls.

- Invite a speaker from the Virginia Interfaith Center to visit with your congregation.

- Work with members of your local government (city or county) to pass a resolution calling on the General Assembly to pass Medicaid Expansion. Sample resolutions are available at [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

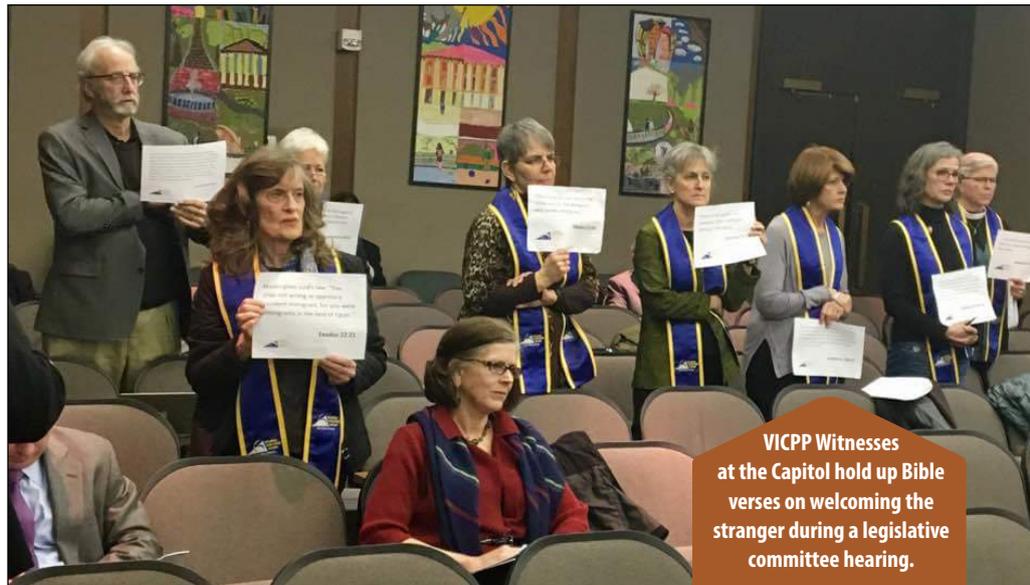
# General Assembly session long and arduous

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy was very active in lifting a moral voice on issues of economic and racial justice before the 2017 General Assembly. VICPP helped:

- stop the cutting of **TANF benefits** for low-income families. Proposals would have reduced from 24 to 12 months the length of time a family could receive public assistance and reduced from 60 to 24 months the total amount of support families could receive in their lifetime. As Board Chair Frank McKinney was quoted in the Richmond newspaper saying, "This was a mean-spirited bill." VICPP was a lead organization in fighting this bill. United Methodists were particularly helpful in fighting this during their advocacy day.

- restore **driver's licenses** to those who owe court fines and fees by leading the advocacy for restoring driver's licenses in both the House and Senate. About 900,000 Virginians have lost their driver's licenses because they owe court fines and fees. This is mostly poor people who've been arrested or had some interaction with the courts. VICPP supported most of the driver's license bills and was a lead organization working on this issue. Several good bills passed that extend the time people can pay fines and fees from 30 to 90 days, stop the practice of piling on suspensions, codify some of the important Supreme Court

**ASSEMBLY is continued on page 10**



VICPP Witnesses at the Capitol hold up Bible verses on welcoming the stranger during a legislative committee hearing.



Executive Director Kim Bobo stands with fellow Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church members Brenda Jefferson (center) and Lilly Branch Kennedy as they witness at the Capitol during the latter stages of the 2017 General Assembly session.

## 'Witness at the Capitol' will be back in 2018

The Witness at the Capitol Team are VICPP volunteers who serve as faithful citizen advocates on our issues during the legislative session. Volunteers should commit for three to five days during one week of the session, or for a regular presence on a day or two (e.g. "I'll be there every Tuesday"). In 2017, 14 volunteers served as witnesses and helped the organization have the strongest "presence" ever.

Volunteers are clergy and lay leaders who want to learn more about how the General Assembly works and want to help influence policies.

Witnesses are the hands-on citizen advocates for VICPP's priority issues. They will:

- attend and report on committee and subcommittee meetings;
- meet with legislators and their staff members;

- communicate the legislators' position to the VICPP members in the districts;
- draft background pieces and alerts for engaging the membership in the issues;
- testify on behalf of issues VICPP is supporting;
- participate in ally meetings, such as the Virginia Transparency Coalition, the HAV Coalition or others.

Volunteers should be active in the faith community and comfortable talking about the faith dimensions of the issues. Current and retired clergy, deacons, and lay leaders are sought.

The work is in Richmond. If you do not live in Richmond, you should be prepared to be in Richmond for at least three days (Tues through Thursday) during one week of the session.

In the early part of the session, meetings tend to be held z

**WITNESS is continued on page 10**

# 'Lord prepare me to be a Sanctuary'

Figuring out how to stand with immigrants, Muslims and Jews in the Commonwealth has quickly become a top priority for the organization, given the attacks on all these communities.

"Even though this is a polarizing issue, it is one on which the faith community is quite strong," Kim Bobo said. "This is an issue that has *chosen us*."

VICPP has hired former intern Lana Heath de Martinez as director for the "Welcoming All" initiative. This effort will fight against the anti-immigrant anti-refugee initiative. Lana is reaching out to congregations about the sanctuary movement and to schools about protecting children.

VICPP is also developed a Passover seder that will be fielded to communities with a theme of welcoming the stranger (see related article).

Given the uptick in hate crimes against immigrants, Muslims and Jews, VICPP stepped up its work to create "circles of protection" VICPP began supporting the creation of Rapid Response Networks and providing congregations information about being a sanctuary., as well as helped sponsor several unity events that have drawn significant crowds. VICPP was a lead witness opposing the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee bills introduced into the 2017 General Assembly.

In the last few years, hate crimes have been on the increase. According to a recent press release from Attorney General Mark Herring, "the FBI said 158

hate crime incidents were reported in Virginia in 2015. Two-thirds were motivated by a bias based on race, ethnicity or ancestry, 15 percent by religious bias and 15 percent by sexual orientation bias.

Hate crimes in Virginia increased 21 percent from 2014 to 2015."



The Center also supported the Attorney General's efforts to strengthen reporting of hate crimes and vigilance against hate crimes. Unfortunately those bills were unsuccessful in the recently ended session of the General Assembly.

During this last election cycle, there was an increase an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric at the national

level. This has trickled down around Virginia, with both immigrants and Muslims report feeling targeted and fearful. This should not be in Virginia. The Virginia Interfaith Center believes Virginia must remain a welcoming state — welcoming immigrants and welcoming various faith groups. What state has a prouder history of freedom of religious than Virginia?



VICPP's Welcoming All Coordinator, Lana Heath de Martinez, leads a workshop on Sanctuary at Temple Beth El.

# Interfaith community denounces ICE raids

Supporters of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy have strongly condemned the immigration raids that occurred in late March in Virginia and other parts of the nation. ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) arrested 82 individuals during a five-day operation focused in Virginia and the District of Columbia that ran from March 26-30.

These raids which targeted working fathers and long-time Virginia residents resulted in the division of multiple families rooted in the community. ICE officers misrepresented themselves as local police, undermining community trust in local law enforcement. Our neighbors remain unsafe, pushed further into the shadows. It is incumbent upon each of us to advocate for greater accountability and policies that promote justice for all.

Values that are foundational across faith traditions include welcoming the stranger and caring for the vulnerable. The interfaith community grieves today with the families experiencing trauma from separation and police intimidation, who find themselves more vulnerable than ever. We stand with all who have much to fear and will continue to work alongside our neighbors from all walks of life to make our communities places of welcome and inclusion.

## Comments:

### Kim Bobo, VICPP Executive Director:

"Indiscriminate raids that target hard-working immigrant parents throw families into crisis and communities into terror. We want Virginia to be safe and welcoming for all. Such raids undermine safety and welcome."

### Lana Heath de Martinez, Welcoming All Coordinator:

"Our traditions may be different, but our call as people of faith is the same: to love our neighbors, to care for the suffering, to walk with the marginalized through every darkness. Where we can see boundaries to our care and solidarity, it is up to us to break them down until every person lives freely in the light.

"Working with faith communities to make our spaces



safe and free extends far beyond the doors of our places of worship. We continue to urge localities across the Commonwealth to listen to feedback from impacted communities and implement policies and practices that will limit ICE activity to the furthest extent possible. This is our task until all people are safe and free."

### Rabbi Michael Knopf, Temple Beth-El, VICPP Richmond Chapter member:

"Scripture teaches us to care for and defend those who seek our protection and not deliver them to those from whom they have fled. This principle applies to all, regardless of their immigration, social, or economic status. We are called to consider their interests, to offer them our generosity, and take care not to cause them pain.

"The recent arrest of three undocumented immigrants — in front of their families without warning or provocation — in Richmond, along with similar actions being carried out nationwide, violate these biblical teachings. Instead of separating families, causing economic disruptions and dislocations, and putting deportees at risk of serious harm and death, our

leaders should be pursuing compassionate and fair immigration reform while protecting the civil liberties of immigrants (regardless of federal immigration status) and ensuring that immigration proceedings are carried out with due process.

"Meanwhile, such actions underscore the need for Richmond and its surrounding municipalities, as well as schools and houses of worship, to become 'sanctuaries,' protecting those in our community who are most vulnerable."



# Looking to add Faith Advocacy Partners

**F**aith Advocacy Partners is a new initiative of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

The Center has been reaching out to congregations that have already supported VICPP. These congregations are being asked to take some advocacy action.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What is the pledge to which a Faith Advocacy Partner commits?** “Advocating for social justice in the ‘halls of power’ is a part of our mission and we partner with the Virginia Interfaith Center to help us do that.”

**What is the advantage of joining the network of Faith Advocacy Partners?** Faith Advocacy Partners join their voices with people of faith from across the state. Together, our faith communities represent a powerful, moral voice for social change. Participation in the network also provides faith communities with access to Virginia Interfaith Center’s wide range of advocacy resources, from education curriculum and legislative updates to advocacy training and leadership development.

**How do we determine what issues to work on?** The Virginia Interfaith Center relies heavily on our faith communities to help determine our advocacy issues. We encourage faith communities to discern issues by communicating with their local communities and reflecting on their religious traditions. The VICPP Board and Chapter leaders then develop a strategic agenda, usually focusing on one top-tier issue and a few additional issues. The Center has previously worked on issues related to hunger, homelessness, economic justice, the environment, sustainable agriculture, education, healthcare, criminal justice reform and human rights.

**Does becoming a Faith Advocacy Partner require that we support every position the Virginia Interfaith Center takes on individual issues?** No. Becoming a Faith Advocacy Partner simply means that a faith community affirms our shared calling to advocate for a more just and sustainable world. How you and your faith community carry out a ministry of advocacy in your local context is up to you. When the Virginia Interfaith Center takes a position on a particular issue, it is a recommendation that we hope individuals within your faith community will consider and engage with.

**Does participating as a Faith Advocacy Partner require a financial commitment?** Yes. A part of being in VICPP’s state-wide network of Faith Advocacy Partners is a regular financial contribution, at a level that make sense for your budget. Faith Advocacy Partners can make VICPP a line item in your annual budget or special mission allocations, collect a special offering for VICPP, or host a fundraiser that benefits VICPP’s advocacy. Faith Advocacy Partners are also encouraged to let VICPP know of endowments or other funding sources in your community to which we can apply for funds, and attend or sponsor our annual VICPP awards dinner fundraiser in the fall.

Your contribution makes a difference!

**Is VICPP a lobbying organization?** VICPP is a 501(c)(3) organization that works on economic and racial justice issues. The organization educates and equips its leadership and volunteers to speak directly to government officials as one method of doing advocacy, but the work is always done in a nonpartisan manner and the advocacy work is well within the limits established by the Internal Revenue Service. The network of Faith Advocacy Partners empowers and supports faith communities and individuals to seek social change through a variety of means, including education, direct action and religious witness.

**Will becoming a Faith Advocacy Partner affect our tax status?** No. Becoming part of the network will not affect your tax status. 501(c)(3) organizations are prohibited from certain political activity like, for example, endorsing candidates for political office. VICPP does not take positions on candidates, only on issues. Nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations are permitted to engage in public education, hosting of candidates’ forums when all candidates are invited, encouragement of voter participation, and endorsement of initiatives, among other activities.

For more information, contact the VICPP office at (804) 643-2474.

During 2017, with your help we will:

- **Stand with immigrants and Muslims.** Given the increased raids, efforts to halt refugee resettlement and increase in hate-talk and hate-crimes in Virginia, VICPP is supporting ways to stand with immigrants and Muslims.
- **Educate and engage people in stopping and deterring wage theft.** VICPP has formed a wage theft task force and is working to educate and engage congregations in the issue. We are asking communities to:

- Host an educational forum on wage theft.
- Conduct a wage theft survey of low-income workers.
- Support emerging worker centers.
- Explore creating a living wage certification program.
- Meet with Delegates and Senators about sponsoring a bill to revamp the state Payment of Wage bill. (A draft should be ready by June.)

- **Develop and promote ways congregations can support restorative justice and criminal justice reform.**

We are asking congregations to:

- Organize a book study of either *Just Mercy* or *The New Jim Crow*.
- Connect with and support area prison ministries.
- Offer community service projects through your congregation.

- **Advocate healthcare policies that serves low-income people.**

In 2015 and 2016, VICPP advocated Virginia expanding health care by drawing down federal Medicaid dollars. Now, the major focus on healthcare has shifted to the federal level. VICPP will engage people in supporting healthcare proposals that would best serve low-income families.

# CHAPTER NEWS



Members of the new Williamsburg area chapter gather on Duke of Gloucester Street for a 'Moral Monday' rally.



Middle left: The Northern Piedmont Chapter sponsored a "Unity Rally" in downtown Warrenton to protest the Trump travel ban and attracted 400 people!

Middle Right: Darcy Hirsch of the Northern Virginia Chapter shakes hands with Attorney General Mark Herring at an event sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, where she serves as Director of Virginia Government and Community Relations.



A Muslim woman holds one of our posters during a Feb. 2 news conference on the Religious Freedom Act.



## Scenes from 2017 Day for All People



A large crowd made the Day for All People in January a very special day for staff and supporters of the Virginia Interfaith Center. Participants filled up the Fellowship Hall at historic Centenary United Methodist Church, then walked down Grace Street to the General Assembly building, to meet their legislators and gather outside for an interfaith worship service. Returning to the church for lunch, we got to hear from the Attorney General of Virginia, Mark Herring, and others who directly affected by issues like wage theft, healthcare access and incarceration. All in all, it was an excellent day of advocating for justice for all.





## Center works to connect with students

A workshop at last January's "Day for All People" event allowed students and faculty from Shenandoah University and VCU to discuss strategies for strengthening the Center's ties with campuses throughout the Commonwealth. Since then, a VCU student has fulfilled community engagement hours while assisting with our worker justice campaign.

The Center developed an interfaith organizing workshop featuring community activist Dr. Ahmad Damaj for a State Department-sponsored delegation of young leaders from the Middle East and North Africa at the University of Virginia's Center for Politics.

Efforts are underway to recruit a William & Mary summer intern to aid the "Welcoming All" initiative in Williamsburg. These compliment student placements of University of Richmond Bonner Scholars and Union Presbyterian Seminary students who are assisting Living Wage and Criminal Justice reform projects.



The Center welcomes any occasion to engage students, faculty, and campus ministers in conversations that identify how VICPP can assist student campaigns or enrich social justice curriculum offerings.

For more information, contact Ron Alpern (804) 929-2714 or [ron@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:ron@virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

**Top, students from Shenandoah University in Winchester walk back to Centenary United Methodist Church after visiting at the General Assembly on the Day For All People in January. About 15 Shenandoah students and faculty members attended the event. Below, VICPP volunteer Ron Alpern (right) helps lead a small group discussion with the several of the students.**

## Continued

### PRAYER, continued from page 1

Among the statements in prayers offered was “we ask (God) to give wisdom and courage to our elected leaders as they prepare to vote on healthcare reform in our nation. May they be guided by principles of love, kindness and justice, and not simple political calculations. We know elected leaders’ work is hard and we ask You to be with them in their deliberations and actions. Be with us this day as we seek to stand for justice and righteousness.”

There was also a litany and an opportunity for participants to share their healthcare stories.



Ron Timmons, youth pastor at St. Elizabeth’s Catholic Church, holds a Virginia Interfaith Center sign during a prayer vigil in Mechanicsville outside the office of Rep. Rob Wittman.

### WITNESS, continued from page 3

Monday through Thursday. Toward the end of the session and right before crossover (when bills cross from one body to the other), more meetings are scheduled on Friday.

Although the session begins Jan. 10, 2018, most committees will meet the following week. The session will go through mid-March. The

### ASSEMBLY, continued from page 3

guidelines and stop license suspensions for minor drug arrests. Although there is clearly more that needs to be in this area, good progress was made in this session.

- stop some of the worst of the **anti-immigrant** bills. There were quite a few of these anti-immigrant and anti-refugee bills. We were a vocal presence against these bills and in favor of making Virginia a more welcoming place. VICPP supported a “Welcoming All” resolution, which was killed. Even though we “lost” on these bill, we demonstrated strong faith support for welcoming immigrants and all faith groups to Virginia.

We spoke against the anti-sanctuary bill three different times. At one of the hearings, we had people holding Bible verses up around the room.

average day will begin at 8:30 or 9, depending on committee schedules, and will run till late afternoon. Sometimes, subcommittees are scheduled at 7 a.m.; we will try to be present even in the early morning.

If you are interested in participating the entire time, for a week or two, or on a regular basis, contact Kim Bobo at [Kim@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:Kim@virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

At another hearing, so many clergy talked against the bill and quoted Bible verses that the Committee Chair said it sounded like “Bible Jeopardy”!

- support a bill that would have allowed workers to take their **wage theft** claims to court. The bill failed, but VICPP advocates talked with legislators about the issue of wage theft and identified potential sponsors for bills on wage theft next year.

- support expanding **mental health and substance abuse services** in Virginia. We joined partner organizations in expanding resources for mental health and substance abuse.

We also worked on:

- raising the felony threshold. This modest proposal to raise the felony threshold from \$200 to \$500 was killed again, making sure Virginia has the lowest in the nation.

## VICPP, JCRGW team up for Interfaith Welcoming Seder

The Virginia Interfaith Center and the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington collaborated to encourage families, congregations and communities to hold Interfaith Welcoming Passover Seders during this Passover season, which began April 10. The Interfaith Welcoming Passover Seder will:

- Build relationships between Christians, Jews, Muslims and immigrants in our midst;
- Affirm that Virginia is a place that welcomes all;
- Challenge messages and acts of hate that have made Jews, Muslims and immigrants feel frightened or unwelcome;
- Lift up the Passover themes of justice and migration.

Any person, congregation or community can plan an Interfaith Welcoming Passover Seder. The Center is offering a sample service compiled by Rabbi Bruce Aft, Congregation Adat Reyim of Springfield, Darcy Hirsh and Rabbi Batya Steinlauf of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, and the Rev. Charles Swadley, a retired United Methodist pastor in Williamsburg, with excerpts from the HIAS Haggadah Supplement 2017 and AJC Festival of Freedom Supplement. Please feel free to take this model service and adapt it as you see fit. Download at [http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Interfaith\\_Seder1.pdf](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Interfaith_Seder1.pdf)

### 2017 Interfaith Welcoming Passover Seder



# Moving forward with wage theft programs

**V**ICPP made great strides in positioning itself as a leader on wage theft in 2016 and into this year.

VICPP convened a Wage Theft Task force, composed of some of the top experts in the state. The task force met to outline general plans and then met with the Secretary of Labor and Industries (DOLI) and staff from the Department of Commerce.

In 2014, the Governor created a Misclassification Task force with great fanfare. Misclassification is when an employer calls a worker an independent contractor when the person is really an employee. This is one of the most common forms of wage theft. It not only hurts workers, denying them overtime, unemployment, workers compensation, employer-side of payroll taxes and other labor protections, but it robs the government of needed revenue. (Virginia loses more than \$26 million in revenue by not cracking down on misclassification.)

This task force met three times in 2015 and did not meet once in

2016. VICPP advocated with the Commerce Department and the Governor to get this Task force moving again. The Task force met in March and has begun doing some joint task force investigations.

During the General Assembly, VICPP volunteers met with Delegates and Senators about the issue of wage theft. This year VICPP will be working to improve both the Minimum Wage and the Payment of Wages bill and will seek sponsors for bills for the 2018 General Assembly. These state laws are very poor. The laws have no overtime provision, no “right of private action” (ability to take a case to court), no protection against retaliation, and exclude every category of work that was historically held by African Americans (“farm work, domestic work, ticket takers, shoe shine boys,” and so forth).

The Richmond VICPP chapter is partnering the Mayor’s Office of Community Wealth Building to develop a Living Wage Certification program. The program identifies, honors and promotes business that pay living wages.

Employee

Independent Contractor



## Center supports Loupassi’s bill on driver’s licenses, and it passes

**O**ne out of six Virginia drivers have had their licenses suspended for not paying court fines and fees. Many have called this practice Virginia’s “debtor’s prison.” Essentially, poor people lose their licenses because they are poor and can’t pay the debts. In most communities, it is hard to get or keep a job without a license, and so poor people get trapped into poverty.

VICPP educated people of faith and elected leaders about how important this issue was to poor people and that Virginia needed to change its policies. VICPP encouraged the lead House sponsor Delegate Manoli Loupassi to introduce a bill and then VICPP engaged its members in advocating with the Courts of Justice Committees that heard the bills.

Delegate Loupassi’s bill passed the General Assembly during its regular 2017 session and Governor McAuliffe offered some modest, but important amendments, which were approved almost unanimously by the General Assembly during its April 5 “veto” session.



Loupassi

The bill sets up a payment plan system that will reduce the number of people who lose their licenses for unpaid court fines and fees.

VICPP thanks Delegate Loupassi for his leadership in championing this issue.

On other judicial reform issues, we are working with a judge who is interested in supporting houses of worship that want to provide community service opportunities in lieu of prison time.

Well-run programs already exists in Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax, but not in other parts of the state.

The Center is working to understand more about how congregations can assist with community service and will be creating a toolkit to assist congregations.

# First Faith Advocacy Partners join VICPP's team

**T**wo Richmond-area congregations have become the first Faith Advocacy Partners for the Center.

**Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church**, on Mechanicsville Turnpike in east Richmond, calls itself "the international house of love" with "an inclusive ministry for a diverse society," has a strong social justice ministry — past, present and future! The church participates in the Jubilee Assistance Fund, a fair lending program operated out of the Virginia United Methodist Credit Union. Wesley Memorial also does regular distributions of food and clothes items to public housing residents, distribution of toiletries and undergarments to incarcerated persons, works with the Latino community to make Richmond a sanctuary city, partners with Raise Up in efforts to secure a decent living wage, and joins in ACTS (Area Congregations Together in Service) community ministry. VICPP Board Member the Rev. Rodney Hunter is the pastor.

**St. Bridget Catholic Church** in Richmond also has a strong social justice commitment, with participation ranging from Habitat for Humanity builds, hosting CARITAS, ongoing relief work in Haiti, blood drives, featuring fair trade products, jail ministries, a "Cross Over" healthcare ministry, The Micah Initiative education program and many more.

Faith Advocacy Partners are churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, seminary and undergraduate faith groups and other social justice organizations committed to partnering with each other and with the Virginia Interfaith Center for more effective advocacy. Congregation members agree to support the Center financially, prayerfully, and by participating in activities such as holding study groups, organizing letter-writing gatherings or attending VICPP events. For more information on this program of involvement with the work of the Virginia Interfaith Center, visit our website, and share this news with your congregations.

## CALENDAR

### COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE FORUM — APRIL 19

The Center is co-sponsoring a community forum from 7-9 p.m. on the Mary Washington Hospital campus in the John F. Fick III Conference Center, 1301 Sam Perry Blvd., Fredericksburg, 22401. The event is a non-partisan educational forum with experts who will make brief presentations discussing health insurance, including the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion.

### YOM HASHOAH — APRIL 23

A Day of Remembrance for the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust. Ceremony at 2 p.m. Virginia Holocaust Museum, 2000 E. Cary St, Richmond, 23223.

### INTERFAITH WELCOMING SEDER — APRIL 26

Join an Interfaith Welcoming Seder at 6:30 p.m. at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, located at 1720 Mechanicsville Pike in Richmond. Rabbi Gary Creditor will lead the seder, with people of all faiths invited and welcome Bring a Passover dish to share; for tips on what to bring, you can find recipes on Jamie Geller's "Joy of Kosher" site. RSVP to Kim Bobo at [kim@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:kim@virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

### INTERFAITH WELCOMING SEDER — APRIL 30

Interfaith Welcoming Seder, 3 p.m., Geshar Jewish Day School, 4800 Mattie Moore Ct., Fairfax, 22030. Sponsoring houses of worship include: ADAMS Center, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Community of Faith United Methodist Church, Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Temple Rodef Shalom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Annandale Virginia Stake, Unitarian Universalist Church of Sterling. Learn more and RSVP at [www.jcouncil.org](http://www.jcouncil.org).

### THE PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH — APRIL 29

People of faith will join students, workers, parents, and people on the front lines of climate change; 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Washington (between 3rd and 4th and Pennsylvania Ave.).

### IMMIGRANT AND WORKERS' DAY OF ACTION — MAY 1

May 1 is celebrated at International Workers Day and will include rallies, marches and protests across the nation. Congregations in northern Virginia are urged to attend the march in Washington (5 p.m., Malcolm X Park, 2400 15th Street NW).

**In Richmond, the May Day theme will be "Sanctuary for All." Plans include a gathering at Abner Clay Park starting at 10:30 a.m. with an interfaith prayer vigil, with an art expo (visual, spoken word, music, and dance) in the park, and at 1:30 p.m. a rally and march to Capitol Square in support of immigrant rights, workers' rights and fair wages. Then at 5:30 there will be a cookout back at Abner Clay Park, followed by a parade.**