

VERMONT INTERFAITH ACTION

TRANSFORMING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

December 2020



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A Tumultuous Year Affects Our Priorities

As we all know, 2020 has been quite a year! After two Virtual Convocations to check in with leaders once the pandemic hit and once society started paying more attention to systemic racism, we at VIA decided to alter our issue focus. These discussions prompted us to: 1) initiate a Statewide Affordable Housing and Homelessness organizing committee (instead of the regional ones we had previously) and 2) explore various avenues of uprooting racism.

Our Statewide Housing/Homelessness group is committed to continuing the strides made

because of the pandemic in housing those who have been precariously housed. Our primary focus is to increase the number of rental housing units across the state that low-income folks can afford. Our efforts to dismantle systemic racism have included a network of discussion groups throughout Vermont studying the book “The Hate U Give,” turning the focus of our Burlington Clergy/Elders Caucus to partnering with the Vermont Racial Justice Alliance on ideas that people of color have identified, and

Continued on page 2



A Tumultuous Year... from page 1

forming a local organizing ministry on racial justice comprised of members from the two UCC congregations in Burlington.

Because this was also an election year, we ran a successful campaign to get people to vote their values, called “(Just) Vote,” reaching over 3,600 individuals. We will be continuing this effort by phone/text banking and conducting board of election monitoring in Georgia’s Jan. 5th Run-Off election through our national network, Faith in Action. If you are interested in helping with the GA effort, contact Melissa at melissa@viavt.org.



Leaders from St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Brattleboro gather to discuss conducting a listening campaign.

VIA Is Growing!

Vermont Interfaith Action started in 2004 with seven congregations in Burlington. In the last 16 years, the organization has expanded to include focused organizing efforts in areas around not only Burlington, but also Barre-Montpelier, Brattleboro-Bennington, and now the Upper Valley. We also have connections with and have sponsored organizing events in Middlebury, Rutland, St. Albans, and the Northeast Kingdom. Altogether we count 68 member and affiliated congregations, comprised of 15,000 Vermonters from the Protestant, Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu faith traditions.

Our most recent growth spurt has been in the Upper Valley, that region on the border of Vermont and New Hampshire that has a cultural identity all its own. We welcome

those Vermont congregations who have been members of another organization and are considering joining VIA, and we welcome our staff Organizer for that area, Ryan Paige!

Having grown up on Long Island, Ryan will be moving back north from his most recent home in Cary, North Carolina. He and his family will be arriving in Vershire on December 1st. Ryan has a Master of Divinity degree from Asbury Seminary and is ordained as an independent minister, having concentrated on family and youth ministry. Over the last several years he increasingly emphasized social justice in his faith journey and is excited to learn organizing and further our justice goals at VIA. We are excited to continue to grow our efforts to make Vermont more compassionate and just for everyone!

In Brief...

Melissa and Debbie have been virtually attending “Impact,” hosted by the Washington-based Centers for Budget and Policy Priorities (Public Assets Institute is our local chapter of this network). The event includes panels and workshops on racial justice, appropriations and tax policies, housing, health care, and more... Debbie will be virtually attending the Faith in Action Executive Directors Gathering on Dec. 1st and 2nd... our Fifth Annual Statewide Convention, with about 50 attendees, was held -- you guessed it -- virtually, on Nov. 15th.