

Summary

Vermont Interfaith Action held our Fourth Annual Statewide Convention in Randolph, Vermont on Friday, August 16. The event focused on reports of organizing activity throughout the state and featured two inspiring and challenging speakers.

The reports included a description by the staff of an education initiative called Parents and Youth for Change (PYC) that VIA conducts with partner organization Voices for Vermont's Children. PYC plays a unique role in the Burlington and Winooski school districts, organizing students and their families, especially those who live in generational poverty and those who are immigrants and refugees, to improve schools' responsiveness to their needs and to ensure that learning is truly student-centered. In addition, Daniel Quipp, VIA's new organizer in the Southern part of Vermont, including Brattleboro, Bennington, and points in between, shared some of his background as an educator, activist, and community leader and talked about his efforts to build relationships and form local organizing committees in this region. And Asma Elhuni, the lead organizer for VIA's sister organization in the Upper Valley, which straddles Vermont and New Hampshire, shared about their emphasis on fair and impartial policing and unjust treatment of immigrants.

Issues that have been chosen through a grassroots process were reported on, including the quest to increase the supply of affordable housing in Chittenden County, efforts to eradicate homelessness in Washington County by 2020, pressing for changes in inhumane federal immigration practices, and pushing passage of an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and the initiation of a paid family and medical leave insurance program as part of our ongoing Movement Toward a Moral Economy.

Other issues reported on were Corrections Reform, which will be highlighted in a public Action event at St. Paul's Cathedral on Tues, Oct. 29 at 7 pm to press for better facilities, improved programming, and an emphasis on a restorative, therapeutic approach to incarceration; Restaurant Roundup, a program in which restaurants ask patrons to round up their bills to make donations to Hunger Council food security projects; and Voter Engagement, an effort to hold candidates forums and do canvassing and phone banking to increase voter participation in the 2020 election cycle.

Attendees at the Convention were challenged and inspired to uproot the racism that underlies issues of social justice by two outstanding speakers. Rev. Dr. Alvin Herring, the Executive Director of the national network to which VIA belongs, Faith in Action, which is comprised of 48 affiliates in 20 states and 3 foreign countries, spoke about how people of faith are called to stand in solidarity with those who are hurting and treated unjustly in our society on the basis of their race, immigration status, religion, and record of incarceration. Former state Rep. Kiah Morris of Bennington, who was the only Black woman in the Vermont legislature when she ended her campaign for re-election in 2018 because of racial threats and harassment, challenged people of faith to speak up where we see injustice and not stand idly by waiting for someone else to advance the values we say we hold.

All in all, the event was powerful, informative, and energizing and an accurate reflection of the great work for social justice that is being conducted by people of faith throughout Vermont despite the challenges of our current time.