

Standing Together in Tidewater



A crowd of more than 200 attend Standing Together.

by Robin Mancoll

In response to increasing Islamophobia, xenophobia, and divisive rhetoric, the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities' Standing Together event on Sunday, Jan. 24 at the Slover Library, did exactly what it set out to do. The afternoon event with more than 200 people brought together a diverse group to speak out and stand with the Muslim community and others who are marginalized.

Featuring a clergy press conference and interfaith panel discussion, people came from many different faiths to share a message of unity during turbulent times. Speakers included faith leaders from the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Presbyterian Church (USA), and Hindu communities.

Jonathan Zur, president & CEO of the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, led the efforts for the initiative in Tidewater. "It was so meaningful to see over 200 people gathered in support of Standing Together. As we noted in the pledge that was read at the end of the program, all of us are at risk when one group is unjustly targeted. I hope that Standing Together remains an initiative that brings diverse groups together to

uphold our highest ideals and values as a community, Commonwealth, and country."

In his remarks, Rabbi Israel Zoberman said, "Diversity, my friends, is divine.

"We all stand together in the arc of survival."

Standing Together, not just a one-time event in Tidewater, includes an online pledge where the community can show

their commitment to stand together, educational resources on the diverse groups that comprise the U.S.A., a social media campaign encouraging everyone to #StandTogether, and more. A full page advertisement in *The Virginian-Pilot* with the pledge was signed by 140 community leaders and groups. Visit <http://www.inclusiveva.org/standing-together-hr/> to sign the pledge and learn how to get involved with this initiative.

"It was a privilege, but also a sacred responsibility, to stand with our Muslim brothers and sisters. As Jews, we have known historic persecution and, so, are reminded 36 times in the Torah to "Remember the stranger for we were strangers in the land of Egypt." In practical terms, we are commanded that anytime our neighbor bleeds we cannot stand idly by. Our neighbors are bleeding. If we, who have been in their place before, do not act, who will?" says Rabbi Roz Mandelberg.

"I attended the Standing Together event because the Jewish community needed to be represented at a gathering in protest of ethnic and religious intolerance and in support of making Hampton Roads a place where people can show their humanity and co-exist," says Jay Klebanoff, president of United Jewish Federation of Tidewater.

"Jews are no strangers to persecution based on belief and appearance. It was heart-warming and encouraging to join together in a setting where friendship and respect prevailed," he says.



Imam Vernon Fareed, Jagdish Singh, and Barry and Lois Einhorn.



Nishan Singh Sidhu of Guru Nanak Foundation of Tidewater.