

STANDING TOGETHER!

by Deborah K. -Greenberg
CBA Council for Social Justice



On Sunday afternoon January 10, 2016, Congregation Beth Ahabah was the site of an historical event as over 600 people from the greater Richmond area—Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Catholic, B'hai, Buddhist, African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian American—filled our pews to attend “Standing Together.” The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC, formerly the National Council of Christians and Jews) organized and led the exhilarating community program in response to highly-publicized political verbal assaults on the Muslim community. VCIC’s answer to these politics was to unite clergy from all religions in the area and immediately to issue a press statement condemning these tactics; to purchase a full-page advertisement in the Sunday Richmond Times-Dispatch

doing the same and signed by institutions as well as individuals, including Congregation Beth Ahabah, Rabbi Beifield and Rabbi Gallop; and to culminate in “Standing Together” at Beth Ahabah.

Rabbi Beifield opened the event by warmly welcoming all, followed by Imam Ammar Amonette of the Islamic Center of Virginia, the Reverend Dr. John Kinney of Virginia and Sister Marie Mack of Bon Secours Health Systems. A panel discussion of various religious leaders followed.

A very lively segment of the program ensured next when the congregation was divided up into smaller discussion groups by pews, with a VCIC-trained leader and a list of suggested questions. All groups were intermingling, talking, laughing, trading business cards and very much enjoying discussing their topics. Some have met on their own since January!

Senator Tim Kaine wrapped up the program with observations from his just-completed trip to Turkey and Europe. He told us that everywhere he journeyed, people wanted to know what American’s position was on what they had been reading



in the news. He was delighted to be able to tell them that the next day he was going to a synagogue to a rally by all religionists to support Muslims from abuse!

The Council for Social Justice was the liaison between the VCIC and Congregation Beth Ahabah. Our members welcomed all those attending, ushered them to their seats, and provided refreshments in the Goldburg Auditorium following the event.

Jonathan Zur, CEO of VCIC, is using the momentum from this event to push forward and the Council for Social Justice intends to follow his lead. Join us!

Photos courtesy of VCIC: Top Left - US Senator Tim Kaine and Jonathan Zur, CEO of VCIC; Middle - Community dialogue; Top Right - Lillie Estes and Sumeja Zahirovic lead a community dialogue.



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