

Activities for Poverty Abolitionists in Virginia



www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org

Background: The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy organized two five-session book studies in August 2023 of Matthew Desmond's book, *Poverty, by America*. Participants asked VICPP to compile some activities to consider for people who want to be poverty abolitionists.

Be a Public Policy Advocate

- Join VICPP's Action Network to join with others on state public policy advocacy. www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org (or tinyurl.com/vicppsignup).
- Attend the Day for All People Advocacy Day at the General Assembly, held annually in January – the Wednesday following the start of the General Assembly (usually the Wednesday after MLK Day).
- Volunteer to serve as a VICPP Congregational Liaison to connect your congregation with the state advocacy for justice.
- Connect with a VICPP chapter and help advocate with your state elected leaders.
- Ask candidates for office how they will help end poverty.
- Join with local organizing groups to engage with your city or county government that decides most local housing policies.
- Sign up for your denomination's national public policy organization to stay abreast of national policy. Also, join Bread for the World (www.bread.org) and the National Low-Income Housing Coalition (www.nlihc.org) for national policy updates.

Advocate Equitable Zoning

- Sign up to receive your local zoning board notices or review meeting minutes.
- Stand up for building affordable housing when there are zoning conversations in your community. Be prepared to speak *for* affordable housing.
- Support efforts to create inclusionary zoning in your community.

Support Living Wages

- Encourage employers in your community, including congregations, to become living wage certified at www.livingwagevirginia.org.
- Patron employers that pay living wages. If you hire a service (landscape, cleaning), ask how workers are paid.
- Avoid or confront employers that commit wage theft (not paying workers all their legally owed wages). Ask tipped workers if they will receive their tips if put on a credit card. For more information about wage theft, visit www.wagetheftva.org.
- Stand with workers who are organizing to improve their wages and benefits. Showing up matters.
- Advocate fair wages for everyone with your own employer or congregation.

- Support public policies to raise the minimum wage, curb wage theft, and policies that support workers in low-wage jobs, such as paid sick days and childcare assistance.

Develop relationships with low-income families/individuals.

- Host a free meal and invite homeless individuals. Or prepare a meal and take it to an encampment of unhoused people. Use the mealtime to get to know your neighbors that are unhoused. Ask what their needs are and explore how you can help them.
- Provide an afternoon of free childcare for low-income working parents.
- Visit your local school and ask what challenges the school faces.
- Visit a community center, library, pool, or church in a poor neighborhood and learn how they face challenges in your area.
- Contact the local PTA in a Title 3 school and volunteer at their fundraiser or community event.

Build or Support Affordable Housing

- Support a Habitat for Humanity project or other nonprofit housing development.
- Ask your local elected leaders what they are doing to address the affordable housing crisis.
- Support affordable housing policies (see section above “Be a State Public Policy Advocate”).
- Join a local organizing group fighting for affordable housing.

Give Generously

- Give generously to programs that fight poverty - both charitable activities and economic justice advocacy.
- Help a family with a downpayment. If you helped your child with a downpayment, help someone who has no family wealth become a homeowner.
- Use your will to help balance the playing field for low-income families. Don’t just leave your assets to your children if they are doing fine.
- Calculate the value of your mortgage interest tax deduction and contribute that amount to an anti-poverty group.
- Donate a tax refund if you do not need it.

Evaluate Your Complicity

- Ask how you benefit from low-wage workers and explore ways to stand with workers and advocate living wages.
- Consider your friends and community. If you are not friends with people who are struggling, explore ways to build new relationships.
- Explore if efforts to support your children conflict with supporting a more equitable society.

Engage Your Congregation

- Host a book study of *Poverty, by America*. Use VICPP’s study guide questions.
- Become a Living Wage Certified congregation.

- Make sure the vendors hired by the congregation pay workers fairly.
- Assess how the congregation's budget, investments or endowment seek to abolish poverty.
- Consider whether your congregation might help build affordable housing – on its land or in support of other initiatives.
- Organize a social action committee and partner with VICPP.
- Plan an immersion experience in your city or another city if you are in a rich neighborhood or a congregation of wealthy congregants.
- Invite a community leader representing low-income people to speak to your congregation about what challenges they are facing in their work.

Consider Where You Live and Worship

- Explore communities that are multi-racial and multi-income for where you live.
- See if there are any retirement communities that are multi-racial and multi-income for you or your parents.
- Consider joining a congregation that is multi-racial and multi-income.
- Put your children in schools that are multi-racial and multi-income.