



PRESS RELEASE

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Fighting Poverty with Faith

Providence, RI – On Thursday, May 11, 2017 the RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty brought together approximately 275 faith leaders, advocates, service providers and community members for the 9th annual Interfaith Poverty Conference, held at Rhode Island College. With 13.9% of Rhode Islanders still living in poverty, concern about poverty is widespread in faith communities all across the state. Coming from a wide variety of congregations, these leaders are committed to learning more and taking action to enact policy changes that would benefit Rhode Islanders living in poverty.

Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., a nationally-esteemed preacher, pastor, author and movement leader, gave the keynote speech. Rev. Dr. Forbes is Senior Minister Emeritus at Senior Minister Emeritus of The Riverside Church in NYC, National Minister of the Drum Major Institute, President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation and co-leader of the Moral Revival. He is an author, a scholar, a preacher and a pastor, with a strong background in ecumenical and interfaith work, including 15 years as co-chair of A Partnership of Faith, an

interfaith clergy organization in New York. A long-time professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary, he is often described as “the preacher’s preacher.” Newsweek named him one of the 12 “most effective preachers” in the English-speaking world and Ebony twice named him one of America’s greatest Black preachers.

Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr. brought a prophetic, prayerful, powerful voice to Rhode Island. Describing the RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty as “part of God’s dream team,” he urged Rhode Islanders to lead on issues of poverty. Citing the history of RI, he called on Rhode Islanders “to help your state do something so your state can lead the US.” “Poverty is a weapon of mass destruction. More people die from it than from all the wars going on simultaneously,” Forbes noted. Poverty, he said, “works against the creation of the Beloved Community.” He invoked God’s vision for the world and the work of the Spirit, a force that “neither slumbers nor sleeps.”

Maxine Richman, co-chair of the steering committee of the Coalition, welcomed guests. She quoted Nelson Mandela’s words: “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.” She noted the state’s 13.9% poverty rate and urged Rhode Islanders to take action. Richman said, “Please join us as together we can make a change, we have the power and the will” to overcome poverty in RI.

Major state policy priority areas for the Coalition include restoring the no-fare bus pass for low-income seniors and people with disabilities, expanding early learning for children, raising the minimum wage, and providing access to driver’s licenses for undocumented Rhode Islanders. Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser of Temple Sinai in Cranston led the crowd in a post-card writing “action moment” in support of the no-fare bus pass. Noting that the no-fare bus pass has been a “lifeline for people with disabilities and seniors”, Goldwasser reflected on his faith, saying, “The Hebrew Bible commands us to provide for the basic needs of society’s most vulnerable.”

Four workshops, offered later in the morning, focused on salient topics in the community, encouraging Rhode Islanders to dive deeper into learning and empowering themselves for thoughtful, justice-oriented action:

- Immigration 101: From Refugees to Dreamers, DACA to Driver's Licenses, an Introduction to Key Immigration Issues in RI
- Fair Pay for Work: (Re) Considering RI's Minimum Wage
- Racial & Economic Disparities in Education & Housing: How De Facto Segregation Functions and How It Harms Our Children
- Growing Older in Community: Transportation Challenges, Food Security Issues & Isolation Risks for Low-Income Seniors

See the enclosed program for a full list of participants and panelists.

The RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty affirmed common values, emphasizing that in our unique faiths we each find the common call to work for social justice. The RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty believes that all Rhode Islanders deserve:

- A safe, affordable place to call home;
- High-quality education, starting as early as possible;
- Reliable, affordable transportation;
- Dependable health care;
- Adequate and nutritious food; and
- Work with decent wages.