Directors’ Note:

Dear Friends,

We thought it would be a fitting way to end the 2020 year by providing visuals and a narrative report of a few of our accomplishments during 2020. Accomplishments we were able to achieve because of your generous support, trust, and faith in our Virginia Interfaith Power & Light staff, Steering Committee, our mission, and our good results. Thank you. We look forward to another exciting year and the continued opportunity to do good work in Virginia. Please enjoy this end of the year newsletter.

We have had an amazing year serving our neighbors here in Virginia supporting work to mitigate the impact of climate change, to advocate for a just transition to a renewable energy economy, and to protect frontline urban and rural communities unjustly targeted to carry the burden of polluting industries. We count it a privilege and joy to work with the people of Union Hill, Buckingham County, Friends of Buckingham, and Bridging the Gap healing community divisions emerging during the fight against proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) and its compressor station. We are happy to be a supporting witness as they continue to work for environmental justice. We can now all celebrate the cancelation of the proposed ACP and the compressor station which would have put the residents of Buckingham County at incalculable risk to their health and quality of life.
It has been equally rewarding to be aligned with C5, Concerned Citizens of Charles City County in their campaign to bring awareness to county residents of the potential health and quality of life impacts of the two proposed fracked gas energy plants. As well, we are proud to have had a part in the creation of SAVE (the Coalition to Stop the Abuse of Virginian Energy), which shines a light on the continued disregard by the energy industry of their responsibility to mitigate climate change and its impacts. Much of the proposed fossil fuel infrastructure including the Mountain Valley Pipeline, C4GT and the Header Improvement Project are destined to push fracked gas through Virginia to the Hampton Roads area and we support resistance to these projects as unnecessary impediments to Virginia reaching its 2045 goals for 100% renewable energy production. VAIPL organizers were an integral part of the formation of these groups and will continue to serve and support their efforts.

Staff Updates

Sadly, we had three valued staff members leave our team as they decided to continue personal and educational pursuits, Geran Lorraine started a Phd program this fall, Kiquanda Baker will be starting a new program in the sciences and Ayesha Noor who wanted more time to devote to her personal business. Both Geran and Kiquanda were key support for much of the good work we were able to accomplish with C5 and SAVE as well as outreach and coordination of our programs.
Kendyl Crawford VAIPL Director went on extended leave of absence in order to offer additional support for her family during an especially difficult time. Faith Harris VAIPL Steering Committee chair took on the role ⅓ time as Interim Co-Director.

We onboarded two new staff members to replace them, Leah Jones, Faith Outreach Coordinator and Kidest Gebre, Education and Communications Coordinator. Kidest and Leah are both recent graduates of two of Virginia’s finest institutions, University of Richmond and William and Mary respectively. In addition to their sound education, talent, and intellect they bring energy, innovation, and passion to VAIPL. Kidest and Leah, launched Interfaith Live! Environmental Justice Now!, the new live streamed policy and education-focused talk show on climate and environmental justice. Kidest and Leah are working together to assist our partners in Buckingham with their efforts to bring solar to community members as well as with Bridging the Gap, a non-profit organization committed to providing a bridge to success for those men and women unfairly targeted by the criminal justice system while also addressing environmental justice and green workforce development. Kidest and Leah are currently collaborating with Bridging the Gap to plan a revitalization concert and fundraiser for the Buckingham community scheduled for February 2021.

Steering Committee Updates

The VAIPL Steering Committee reorganized vote to make Mark Hoggard, Chair, Aliya Farooq, Vice-Chair with Monica Flippin, Richard Cizik, and Rosina Snow continue to serve as members. Sally Johnston joined the Steering Committee in August 2020. As we move to establishing VAIPL as a 501c3 organization we will be expanding memberships and moving to Board status for our current members.

2020 Civic Engagement Highlights

Leah lead VAIPL’s civic engagement efforts and launched a discussion series Relax and Reflect, which focused on the faith values encouraging voter commitment to climate through the pledge to be Faith Climate Justice Voters. By the campaign end we had distributed 2,647 hard copy voter guides and online 390 pledges were signed. With a contact list of 15,071 young BIPOC voters, we reached 9,535 contacts with 512 responding yes they would or had voted. 176 said that they would take the pledge and 89 said they would triple their vote and share the pledge with 3 of their friends or family. Leah also created and launched the Challenge for Green Futures to help faith communities establish green work among their members and will provide training, and guidance to help communities realize their projects. We now have 10 faith communities
registered to make their churches greener with vegetable gardens, energy audits, rain gardens or establishing a green team. VAIPL plans to build on this engagement by developing “faith climate connectors” within each of the 10 registered to be the community liaisons.

Kidest has overhauled VAIPL’s website, coordinated new workshops for example we recently finished the Active Hope series with 13 participants reflecting deeply on our connectedness to earth and one another. She was the liaison scheduling outreach with faith communities and planning the dedication launching Climate in the Pulpits on the Bimah and in the Minbar (CIP). Kidest was chiefly responsible for curating resources and managing our social media for 2021 CIP. We had 24 faith communities sign up and host a CIP event. Many faith communities spoke up for Creation and climate justice. Faith communities offered sermons, had guest lecturers, and Leah, Kidest, and Faith all participated in a discussion on climate change and environmental justice with the pastor of Mosby Memorial Baptist Church. Overall, with our partners, there were 55 faith communities who participated in some way by taking action to encourage voting with climate as a priority. Kidest also joined the IPL Program Advisory Council and helped plan the logistics and resources for Faith Climate Action Week 2021. VAIPL as an Affiliate Partner with IPL will implement and promote Faith Climate Action Week (FCAW), IPL’s annual premiere 10-day program of climate-themed worship services and other activities in celebration of Earth Month. The theme of this year’s FCAW is “Sacred Ground: Cultivating Connections Between Our Faith, Our Food and the Climate.” These are just a few of their accomplishments over the last few months.

2020 Advocacy Highlights
During the 2020 General Assembly, Virginia emerged as a leader in the region by passing the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act, the Virginia Clean Economy Act and the Virginia Environmental Justice Act. The Virginia Clean Economy and the Clean Energy and Community Flood Preparedness Act were first steps to mitigate carbon emissions, protect our neighbors, and mandate that Virginia do its part to fight climate change. While we recognize there are still concerns related to cost protections this legislation helps amplify carbon mitigation as a goal. Our Director, Kendyl Crawford provided expert collaborative leadership working with the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative, the Governor’s office, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Virginia Conservation Network to help push Virginia forward as a climate and environmental justice leader in the region. We supported several important bills and through Kendyl’s leadership, we were instrumental in attracting the support to see them pass into law. To learn more about the 2020 accomplishments, read Updating VAIPL 2020 GA Fact Sheet. We are proud to be a part of this historic shift to make environmental justice and climate change a priority for state legislators.

2021 Vision

As an interfaith organization we place the values of our various faith traditions at the center of our work. These collective values are what fuels our passion for advocating to protect our neighbors. They are also how we recognize the responsibility to transform our global economies to interrupt climate change and mitigate its impacts on our world. At VAIPL we wish to amplify the many faith voices inspirational and cautionary that guide our relationships and our connection to “the earth, our common home.” In 2021 we will continue to do our part to educate, advocate, and provide worship opportunities which amplify and advance these values as well as good climate science to achieve our vision to empower all faith communities across the Commonwealth of Virginia to achieve sustainable living. This means that we will redouble our efforts to build new and strengthen old relationships with faith communities and traditions across the state. Our goal is to provide faith communities with the tools, confidence, opportunities and commitment to amplify earth care, Creation care, and to recognize the interdependence of all life. We also want to empower people of faith to serve as witnesses to policy makers and decision makers.
Black Lives Matter

We have long understood that our mission is to resist climate degradation and to struggle against environmental racism. With the rallies, protests, and the many social media posts Black Lives Matter (#BLM), the movement, became too loud for America to ignore. As people of faith we believe we are called to moral action to make justice and equity available for our neighbors. We were proud that Virginia made Juneteenth a holiday this year and released a e-news letter to share our hope and prayer for a nation whose policies proclaim that #BLM.

“ The ideology of white supremacy undergirds every aspect of society. It so permeates our social intercourse that many live in denial of its presence unaware of the invisible hand which shapes our lives together.

George Floyd’s murder in the street, in broad daylight, in plain sight, was meted out by the invisible hand of white supremacy. His murder was not a single act of extreme police brutality but the result of an evil belief system. The eight minutes and forty-five second taped execution in a very clear way demonstrates the reality that black and brown life is arbitrarily subject to death – at any time, and for any, or no good reason in this system. People here in the U.S. along with people all over the world are facing this reality anew. The descendants of those assigned
not-quite-human status by Jesuit priests and burgeoning pseudosciences in the 1400s have lived and known this reality all their lives.

No holy religion, no sound science, and no relevant philosophy can justify the genocide, enslavement, and resource exploitation of the more than 500 years of Western colonization (though some still try). When we hear the chants by protestors, “Black Lives Matter” and “Defund the police,” or chants from those celebrating the Supreme Court of the United States’ decision on DACA, “This is home,” and chants from Indigenous Americans resisting pipelines on their sacred land, “Water is Life,” we are hearing expressions of the Juneteenth impulse.”

--Read more from “A Juneteenth Prayer” by Faith Harris, Interim Co-Director

2021 Advocacy Focus

During the upcoming 2021 General Assembly and beyond, we will continue to prioritize environmental justice and support common-sense just legislation which strengthen laws protecting the health of all Virginia’s residents and the environment.

- We have launched a multi-year campaign to Protect Virginia’s water resources. The campaign begins with a resolution to acknowledge the human right to water (HRTW) and while we know this will be a heavy lift we are committed to seeing it through.

- Continue with our collaborative partners to strengthen environmental justice statewide by amending the Virginia Environmental Justice Act, which will ensure that all communities
can access clean energy while also ensuring that no community is overburdened by polluting and extractive industries.

• We are thrilled to enter the national and local dialogue for the reduction of greenhouse gases in the transportation sector and equally prioritizing equity of access, expansion and enhancement of services, electrification, modernization of public transportation and a minimum representation of public transit riders to all transportation municipal and state authorities. VAIPL is launching a multi year campaign to make public transit a priority for reduction of emissions and part of an overall plan for a just economic transition.

• With our partner the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) we will work to support heat stress legislation to protect our neighbors working outdoors against the impacts of climate change.

• We are supporting several bills which will be introduced by our partners at the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative, Virginia Conservation Network, League of Conservation Voters, the Green New Deal Virginia Coalition, Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, and Chesapeake Climate Action Network among others to grow healthy communities and advance climate and environmental justice in the state of Virginia.

We expect that the future of our work will be as exciting and demanding as the immediate past. In an effort to meet new demands, opportunities, and the many challenges, we will expand and focus our work on climate and environmental justice across the state. Over the past two years we have carried the designation “program of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.” Both VICPP and VAIPL have grown at such a good pace and are being challenged to do more, not less, to achieve justice in Virginia. This growth and demand is a welcomed challenge but has revealed the need for us to expand our work. We are excited to announce that VAIPL will be working to become its own registered 501c3 organization. We plan to continue our partnership with VICPP working together closely on climate and environmental policy and at the intersection where climate and environmental policy meet with the critical justice issues VICPP has prioritized for many years. We will also continue to support VICPP’s major annual events for instance VAIPL will continue our participation in DFAP with VICPP! Save the date and encourage folks to register! We will be hosting two workshops this year Energy Burden on January 19th 2021 and Water as a Human Right on January 20th, 2021.

We thought it might be useful to share photos from our recent accomplishments to help tell VAIPL’s story for 2020 and beyond.
2020 Press Clips and Highlights


One bipartisan proposal from Jay Jones, D-Norfolk, and Lee Ware, R-Powhatan, known as the Fair Energy Bills Act, aims to address that gap. Drafted in consultation with the Southern Environmental Law Center and Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, the measure—which has been announced by not filed—would restore State Corporation Commission authority to review electric rates set by public utilities. That authority was stripped from the commission by the General Assembly in 2015 under a controversial “rate freeze” law that, when combined with the 2018 Grid Transformation and Security Act, has led to reviews being halted until 2021.

● “Virginia's energy policies should reflect Dr. King's 'inescapable network of mutuality'”, Kendyl Crawford, January 2020.

In Virginia, the legislature is currently considering a bill sponsored by Sen. Jennifer McClellan, D-Richmond, called the Clean Economy Act. This measure will move Virginia's outdated electric grid into a new clean era by transitioning it to 100% clean energy by 2050.

● “Inequality, race and COVID-19”, Kendyl Crawford and Rev. Dr. Faith Harris, April 2020.

For those of us working towards a healthy climate and environmental justice, the high vulnerability of people of color, especially for the African American, Native American, and Latino communities, to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States is just one of the inevitable outcomes we anticipated. Those who have spent any time learning about racial inequalities know that crises, whether the climate crisis or the COVID crisis, amplify inequality and have the potential to deepen the cracks and fractures among us.

Think about which communities depend on the public transportation system and often work service jobs coming into contact with large numbers of people. Think about which communities have high health disparities—dealing with high rates of hypertension, asthma, obesity and diabetes.

● “Faith groups organize to motivate, mobilize climate voters as Election Day nears”, Brian Roewe, October 2020

At least a half-dozen religious campaigns have hosted in on climate change ahead of the election, including Interfaith Power & Light, Catholic Climate Covenant, Franciscan Action Network and the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

The mobilization comes as climate change and the environment have gained traction as issues important to voters, including religious communities.

A new poll released Thursday found wide majorities of voters across faith denominations viewed an important priority for the next president and Congress to pass comprehensive climate legislation, with nearly a in six voters overall calling it a top priority. Nearly two-thirds of all voters strongly or somewhat support the Green New Deal, with popularity highest among Black Protestants (73% strongly support), Jewish people (74% somewhat support), nonwhite Catholics (64% support), and Jewish people (70% support).
Highlights from 2020: In Pictures

In January 2020, VAIPL established itself as an active player for advancing environmental justice within the Virginia General Assembly.

Photo: [Link to VAIPL Director Kendyl Crawford with coalition members from the Sierra Club during the 2020 General Assembly Session, January 2020]

In July Kidest moderated a live discussion with EJ advocates, who worked to expose the injustice to the impacted community of Union Hill.

Photo: [Link to VAIPL Interfaith Live! discussion of ACP cancellation, EJ and Virginia’s Energy Future.]

In January 2020, VAIPL established itself as an active player for advancing environmental justice within the Virginia General Assembly.

Photo: [Link to Geran Lorainne presenting about the Virginia Clean Economy Act, January 2020.]

In July Kidest moderated a live discussion with EJ advocates, who worked to expose the injustice to the impacted community of Union Hill.

Photo: [Link to VAIPL Interfaith Live! discussion of ACP cancellation, EJ and Virginia’s Energy Future.]

Beyond Pipelines: Virginia’s Energy Future and Environmental Justice

Energy Future and Environmental Justice - July 16, 2020
For this year’s Climate in the Pulpits, on the Bimah & in the Minbar, we encouraged congregations with our theme, Vote: Committing Ourselves to Climate Justice and Beloved Community, during #Election2020., October-November, 2020

Photo: Promotional flyer for CIP 2020

In September, VAIPL hosted an interfaith gathering calling on Virginians to vote and support climate justice. The event celebrated the launch of Climate in the Pulpits, on the Bimah, and in the Minbar 2020.

Photo: VAIPL team at the Marcus Davis Peters Circle for CIP dedication event, September, 2020

This fall VAIPL’s #FaithClimateJusticeVoter campaign inspired faith communities to turnout and vote for leaders who are committed to ending environmental injustices, and tackling climate change.

Photo: Rev. Ray McKenzie, of Gravel Hill Baptist Church, Varina participating in our #faithclimatejusticewithvoter Social Media Challenge.
As part of our #Faithclimatejusticevoter civic engagement initiative, VA IPL launched a new program encouraging faith communities to vote with the environment in mind.

Photo: One of the promotional flyers for Challenge for Green Futures

In November, VA IPL launched a special "Environmental Justice Now!" segment of Interfaith Live! to expand our environmental justice education outreach.

Photo: Leah Jones on our first Interfaith Live! Environmental Justice Now with Charles County community members, November, 2020

Photo: Promotional flyer for Engaging Active Hope series

VA IPL’s five-session online series begins Nov. 4.
7 PM - 8 PM EST

Kidest Gebre and Leah Jones on Environmental Justice Now! Discussing water as a human right, December 2020

Faith Harris and Leah Jones on Environmental Justice Now! With Jorge Aguilar from Food & Water Watch to discuss Virginia water rights, December 2020