



Builders of the New Dominion **Briefing Sheet**

WHAT IS OUR OPPORTUNITY? We are uniquely positioned to move Northern Virginia toward a New Dominion of Justice. VOICE is a strictly non-partisan, people-power organization with a strong track record of success—both in concrete wins and in bringing people together across racial, economic, and geographic divides. Our 40 member congregations are located in four jurisdictions: Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, and Prince William. VOICE tackles major issues within jurisdictions, but we are also multi-jurisdictional, because all our counties' and towns' budget and policy changes can be vetoed by our state legislature in Richmond due to the Dillon Rule. In order to win big in any region, we need statewide power. Virginia's "purple-ness" can be used to our advantage: Prince William County is one of a small handful of counties whose votes are critical to state and national election outcomes. That is why we will hold our 2,000-person Assembly in Prince William, where we will aim to grab the spotlight by holding the event one month before the national election, on October 16th. These are the reactions we are aiming to get out of the Assembly: (1) VOICE to be known again as the largest, most powerful people's organization in the state; (2) State and local officials to pledge publicly and explain how they will lead on OUR issues; (3) VOICE be positioned anew to win big in our northern Virginia jurisdictions. In 2017, we will have the opportunity to leverage our newly organized people power to move politicians to address OUR issues due to a wide array of extremely important elections: the gubernatorial election, the attorney general race, House of Delegates races, and Vienna City Council election, etc., as well as numerous county budget decisions.

WHAT IS AT STAKE? We are at a critical moment if we want both our families and our economy to thrive in Northern Virginia. Our region has been known for its first-rate public schools, healthy economy, and high quality of life—but that reality is beginning to crumble. A lot has contributed to this change, including declining federal revenues, changing demographics and needs of the people in Virginia. *What is at stake is our future: Will we use our resources to benefit the whole or will we allow ourselves to be pitted against one another?* The latter is a natural tendency when times get rough and budgets get tight. Since 2010, the state's economy has fared worse than the national average and that of other major metropolitan areas. The old model of relying on federal dollars to buttress the budget is just that, an old model. And while revenues have gone down, needs have gone up. Experts at the Brookings Institution report that since 2008, most low-income families live in the suburbs, not the cities. In addition, Northern VA's immigrant community has increased greatly and, like all new Americans, their children present increased school needs. This past year was the first in 10 years when additional monies were allocated in the state budget for K-12 education, but those new dollars do not begin to make up for the years of school cuts, and they are going disproportionately to schools in wealthier school divisions. The other major demographic change is that today more Virginians are retiring than are entering kindergarten. We have heard from businesses that they are relocating out of the region because they can't find new workers to fill the slots of those retiring who can afford the still-rising housing prices. We know that too many of our own VOICE members have had to move farther and farther away from where they work to find an affordable home—and this means lost hours sitting in traffic. In the last decade we have witnessed a steady disinvestment in public goods—including schools and public transportation—and a steady increase in crumbling infrastructure. The Metro system as a whole is now unreliable and its expansion into Northern VA was done poorly. In order for both the Blue and Silver Line to run efficiently two tunnels were needed but only one was built. Lastly, we are

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witnessing a lack of real politics, an unwillingness for politicians to relate across party lines, to negotiate, and to compromise. At the same time, we have witnessed an increase in a culture of fear that has replaced moderate debate and reasonable conversation. We in VOICE know that we can and must do the work of relating with our neighbors, including those who think differently from us, in order to figure out how we can act together to create a New Dominion.

OUR WINNING STRATEGY: VOICE and our sister IAF organizations have earned a long track record of success because we have always *started with deep listening* to determine the shared interests we want to act on and, next, have *built the relational power* needed to get officials to work with us to ensure real results—such as winning \$1.1 billion to renovate Baltimore schools, \$500 million for senior and family affordable housing in Montgomery County, or winning the funds for 576 new low-income children to attend Pre-K. *Please see VOICE's Annual Report for a list of VOICE's recent victories.*

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUP LISTENING SESSIONS & WHY ARE THEY EFFECTIVE?

They are the building blocks of “real politics” in which people come together, relate, listen to one another’s interests, and determine what we want to work on together that will unite us across economic, political, and ethnic divides. (We do not take on issues that could divide us, there are so many great issues to address that we share.) When these listening sessions are carried out in large numbers they are a finger on the pulse of our community. This Spring, you and 250+ other VOICE leaders and allies will lead small-group listening sessions in Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, and Prince William. We will learn through these sessions what are OUR shared issues that WE will act on.

WHERE AND WITH WHOM CAN WE DO THEM? Here are a few examples. *Inside Your Institution:*

(1) Before a committee meeting; (2) Before a choir rehearsal or teacher training; (3) With a specific group of people who have shared interests or duties (parents with school-age children, teachers, daycare workers); (4) Around a specific topic of interest (e.g., advertise a meeting about criminal justice or affordable housing); (5) After worship (invite people to stay for coffee and a chat); (6) With members from a congregation or institution that rents space in your congregation; (7) Any time more than 8 people are gathered for any meeting---you can start the meeting with a short listening session. *Outside Your Institution:* (1) At local schools (ask for a meeting with the PTO or a group of teachers); (2) With local small business leaders; (3) With a neighboring congregation (planned already: First Baptist with Vienna Baptist and Temple Rodef Shalom with Dar Al Hijrah); (4) With seniors living in senior housing; (4) At a juvenile detention center; (5) With residents of low-income housing; (6) With participants of your institution’s outreach (food pantry, ESL classes); (7) At an army base near you.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SMALL GROUP LEADERS:

1. **Hold at least one small group session** but challenge yourself to do more. You will learn a tremendous amount each time you do one.
2. **At the Session, look out for potential new leaders and write up the top 3 problem areas** that your group stated was most important to them. (A form is in your Small Group Meeting packet.)
3. **If at all possible, attend the June 26th VOICE-Wide Action Team Meeting from 4-6 PM** to join others in reporting back and beginning to hammer out together VOICE’s 2016 Issue Agenda.

Please note other important dates: **September 18th, 4-6 PM: VOICE-Wide Action Team Meeting** where we will finalize our VOICE Issue Agenda & Strategize together about our VOICE Assembly in October. **October 16th, 4-6 PM: The VOICE Assembly** where we will unveil our VOICE Issue Agenda and ask local and regional officials how they will join us in leading on OUR issues.

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