

NAACP prayer breakfast honors Martin Luther King and urges future civil rights efforts

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Gaye Adegbalola speaks about Marguerite Young, who was recognized Monday for her decades of work in city schools.

Each table displayed a photo of Martin Luther King Jr. and something he said.

One read: "Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

Another: "The time is always right to do what is right." And, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

At the tables were seated about 300 members of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and others attending an annual

breakfast Monday celebrating King's birthday. Organized by the chapter, the breakfast was held at Fredericksburg's Walker-Grant Middle School.



Sen. Mark Warner speaks during a prayer breakfast at Fredericksburg's Walker-Grant Middle. The Martin Luther King Jr. Day event was sponsored by the local chapter of the NAACP.

Speakers shared many words at the gathering both honoring and attributed to the iconic civil rights leader recognized with a U.S. federal holiday every third Monday of January. This year, the holiday fell on King's actual birthday, Jan. 15. He would have been 89 years old.

"America today, for all its progress, has some distance to go before fulfilling the dream of Martin Luther King," said U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., who shared remarks at the breakfast.

Warner quoted the opening lines of Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities": "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," he said. "We are living in that moment."

On the "worst" side, the Democrat joked that he prays every day, "Please God don't let that man [President Trump] tweet too much this morning!" Adding, "Those prayers have not been answered."

But Warner pointed out on the “best” side, people throughout the world are suffering less this year from poverty than they ever have in the past. And he said, “There are fewer civil wars and other conflicts happening now than at any time in world history.”

Warner shared two events that reflect the wisdom and vision of King.



The Rev. Aaron L. Dobyne Sr. speaks during a prayer breakfast in honor of King on Monday.

While Warner was Virginia’s governor, he commissioned a civil rights memorial that now has been installed on Capitol Square in Richmond, telling the story of 16-year-old Barbara Johns, who led a walkout at her high school in Farmville to protest the poor conditions her segregated school endured compared to white schools.

“Her courageous actions eventually led to Brown v. Board of Education, and the Supreme Court officially overturning racial segregation,” Warner said. “Barbara now has a memorial that honors her courage and determination, an example for us all.”

Last Thursday, Warner said, in partnership with fellow Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, final passage of a bill was secured that officially grants federal recognition of six Virginia Indian tribes, including descendants of Pocahontas' Powhatan tribe. This action gives the tribes legal standing and status when negotiating with the U.S. government.

"Great things can happen if we follow the arc of moral justice," Warner said. "Martin Luther King's message of hope can uplift each of us with greater hope for the future."

Keynote speaker at the breakfast was the Rev. Dr. Aaron L. Dobynes Sr., who is serving as pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site).

A scholar with degrees in psychology, divinity and ministry, Dobynes also holds a Ph.D. in humanities with a concentration in Martin Luther King studies from the University of Cincinnati.

"You can slay the dreamer, but you can't slay the dream," Dobynes said Monday. After describing the final poignant moments of King's life, Dobynes honored those in the room who have carried King's dream forward.



The Fredericksburg branch of the NAACP hosts a prayer breakfast in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Walker-Grant Middle School in Fredericksburg, Va. on Jan. 15, 2018.

“There are those in this room who have dedicated their lives to making this world a better place for all of us,” he said. “Though things happen every day that are so full of hatred they take your breath away, God has given us love and hope to overcome.”

The chapter recognized in a special tribute Marguerite Bailey Young, who has worked for more than 60 years to improve Fredericksburg City Public Schools and the community at large.

Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw read a letter to Young recognizing her efforts. “There are few in our community who have shown their love for humanity more than you,” it said.”

The service closed with a unity prayer, drawing from “Thou, Dear God,” by King.

“Help us to work with renewed vigor for a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color,” the audience said together. “And above all, keep the fires of freedom burning in our hearts.



The Rev. Lawrence Davies, former Fredericksburg mayor, is recognized during the service, which closed with a unity prayer.



Sen. Mark Warner is greeted by Xavier Richardson (center), Rev. Ernest Woodson, III, and NAACP chapter president Charlyne Jackson-Fields following his remarks at a prayer breakfast in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Walker-Grant Middle School in Fredericksburg, Va. on Jan. 15, 2018.