

# UPDATE



For the spirit of the city

2209 E. GRACE STREET, RICHMOND VA 23223

MARCH 2021

## TENDING THE SPIRIT

### Following The Call

“**R**ichmond Hill residency is transient by design, which is both healthy and challenging.” This statement was part of the recent letter Co-Pastoral Director Rev. Joel Blunk wrote to Richmond Hill’s Council. In it, he marked the February completion of his five-year commitment to his role and residency at Richmond Hill. He also shared that — as a result of discernment about renewing for an additional commitment — he and his wife, Kristen, will transition out of the community this summer. In his letter, Joel continued:

“Being a part of Richmond Hill has been immensely rewarding. Kristen and I are grateful for all aspects of our experience here, including the challenges inherent to community life. As a result, I’ve experienced personal transformation and unprecedented growth. And it’s been hard. When Jesus invited us to lay down our lives for our friends, I believe he had something like this in mind. And I say that on behalf of all of us. Your commitment to this place and your support of me in this role has been humbling and inspiring.

Richmond Hill’s commitment to holding space for a unique monastic community is exquisite and, I believe, the heart of what makes this ministry extraordinary. I hope that commitment is never lost. It’s ironic because it is so tenuous. But the continual stewardship of the prayers and the ability to provide gracious hospitality depends on this unique monastic community. Without it, Richmond Hill would simply be another urban retreat center. With it, Richmond Hill has a life and purpose that is truly Christ-centered and exceptional.”

If you’ve been following the life and leadership of Richmond Hill, you’ve learned of the recent call of Rev. Dr. Lisa Johnson to serve as Co-Pastoral Director, joining Joel in this ministry full-time effective January 1, after nearly a

year as interim. Please know that Lisa has been fully aware of and participating in Joel’s discernment throughout her time of consideration for this role. So, while the news of Joel’s departure comes with disappointment, it is not a surprise. And, while their formal partnership will only run until summer, Joel whole-heartedly endorses Lisa’s call to the Co-Pastoral Director role.

In response to the Blunks’ discernment news, Richmond Hill’s Council President, Cathy Woodson, wrote:

“Responding to the call to Richmond Hill is a call to service, to be dedicated to prayer, spiritual development, racial reconciliation, and hospitality. Our Richmond Hill community has been blessed to have Joel — and his wife, Kristen Saacke Blunk — be with us on our journey. We rejoice and honor his many gifts shared with our community and we will miss his unassuming approach to religious life and commitment to this ministry.

Richmond Hill is a place of transformation, healing and spiritual development and we will continue to thrive by building on Joel’s commitment to our ministry and his prophetic voice. Joel’s spiritual gifts will continue to strengthen and enhance our work as an institution of healing and reconciliation in this region. We are thankful and we support Joel as he begins his transition, and we remain grateful for the Holy Spirit guiding him and Kristen to Richmond Hill.”

At its February meeting, the Council affirmed Joel in his decision and applauded his ministry commitment and work over these last five years. They reported that the Transition Committee which led to Lisa’s call was re-established and will pursue a replacement for Joel’s position. In addition, before the Blunks’ summer departure, Richmond Hill will ensure there’s an opportunity — in-person or virtually — to honor and celebrate Joel and Kristen’s shared legacy. Stay tuned for details about the celebration and about the effort to call a new Co-Pastoral Director to join Lisa in the healing and transformation of metropolitan Richmond.

Both Joel’s & Cathy’s full letters are available online at [richmondhillva.org/transition](http://richmondhillva.org/transition)

*Joel & Kristen  
will transition out  
of the community  
this summer.*

## Richmond Hill Council Members

President  
Cathy Woodson  
Vice President  
Rev. Janet Legro  
Secretary  
Adeline Clarke  
Treasurer  
Matt Dolci

Eric Armstrong  
Dominic Barrett  
Ida Braford  
Rev. Joel Blunk  
Anthony Gaboton  
Tim Holtz  
Rev. Dr. Alesia (Lisa) Johnson  
Katie Johnson  
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Yvette Rajput  
Vickie Seymour  
John Taylor  
Davis Wrinkle

## Community & Staff

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Jim Bennett  
Residents  
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Pam Smith  
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## METRO RICHMOND AT PRAYER

### March 2021 Pray for Health Care in Metropolitan Richmond.

*Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matthew 11:4-6 NRSV)*

**March 7, 2021.** We pray for persons living with terminal illnesses and for their families, friends, and communities; for persons working to find cures for diseases.

**March 14, 2021.** We pray for all the sick and their caregivers, doctors, nurses, hospice workers, home healthcare workers, and all who minister to the health of others.

**March 21, 2021.** We pray for emergency response personnel and all emergency room staff. For hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice programs; and for persons diagnosed with terminal illness.

**March 28, 2021.** We pray for clinics, medical personnel, and all institutions that serve persons who are uninsured or underinsured. For a national health care system that promotes and encourages health, wellness, and well being for all people.

### April 2021

### Pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond.

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight. (Hebrews 13:20-21 RSV)*

**April 4, 2021 – Easter.** We pray for a spirit of hope, of possibility, of eternal life, and of commitment to the redeeming power of God who brings new life out of death to people and communities.

**April 11, 2021.** We pray to remove any spirit of contentiousness, prejudice, greed, jealousy, or enjoyment of others' troubles; for a spirit of humility, respecting and appreciating the gifts and contributions of all.

**April 18, 2021.** We pray for a spirit of love, cooperation, peace, community, and commitment to all people in God's name.

**April 25, 2021.** We pray for a spirit of justice, righteousness, equality, and mutual benefit.

## COMMUNITY NEWS

### Bidding Farewell to Mary and Wayne Lewis

Mary and Wayne Lewis recently left residency to return to their boat in Hampton, VA. Mary has been serving as our Retreat Host for the past several years and Wayne has been a generous volunteer assisting with the upkeep of the dormitory. Long-time advocates of Richmond Hill, the two made a three-year commitment to residency in the spring of 2017. We are grateful for their time in residency and offer them God's blessing as they transition to what's next!

### DeBorah Cannady Interim Retreat Host

Beginning in February, long-time resident, DeBorah Cannady, moved back into the Retreat Host position in our office for an interim time. This is work that DeBorah has done effectively before for Richmond Hill. She combines this role with her current responsibilities as Coordinator of Individual Ministries to coordinate and schedule both individual and group retreats. DeBorah is expected to serve in this capacity for a short term while our retreat operations are slowed due to Covid and until we can find a permanent replacement for Mary Lewis who transitioned out of the community in January. If you would like to schedule a day retreat (no overnight retreats are currently being offered) — for yourself or a small group, please get in touch with DeBorah at [retreats@richmondhillva.org](mailto:retreats@richmondhillva.org)



## A New Season



Each new year brings anticipation for new beginnings. Although we are still struggling with a global pandemic, a plummeting economy, a mental health crisis and various other concerns, a new season is still upon us. In many ways, our prayers have been answered as we have witnessed many in our nation rise up against the wickedness of white supremacy, greed, divisiveness, police brutality, injustices, disparities and the glorification of confederate statues. The thought of freedom has long been on the minds and hearts of those who truly believe in "Liberty and Justice for All". We all must have the opportunity to not only survive, but to thrive, as the next generation prepares to carry the mantle of truth, justice and righteousness. Have you ever wondered what was holding us back from the loving and inclusive community that we have longed and pray for daily? Is it fear of losing power or control? Is it fear of losing ourselves, our ways of thinking or way of life? Perhaps we are comfortable with thinking that we are better than the next person or somehow, we are more deserving than others?

The Armstrong Leadership Program, serving underserved youth, continues to stand in the gap for students who seek to live in a better world. Students have committed to the process of personal transformation, leadership development and striving for social justice. Your support, financial investment, prayers, and energy has made it possible for us to look forward to a new season, a season of doing the work of building a better tomorrow filled with inclusion, empathy, and love. The work is ahead of us, all of us. Because before an impoverished black child is born, the odds are stacked against them. Because black children are far more likely to encounter adverse childhood experiences, and are more likely to face mental and physical health issues later in life. And because poverty is not an isolated issue, it is a collective struggle. We invite you to join us in the work.

**Ways to get involved: Network opportunities, Tutoring, Job Shadowing, Mentoring, Group Facilitation, Scholarship and Sponsorship for Cultural activities.**

The nation and world were Inspired by Miss Amanda Gorman, the youngest known inaugural poet in U.S. history, when she recited "*The Hill We Must Climb*." She proclaimed, "The new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it." I dare to ask the question, are we truly ready to commit our lives to working toward a more inclusive, harmonious, loving and empathetic community? Although the work appears daunting, we believe that God is bigger than the problems, bigger than the tasks, and bigger than all that divides and separates us. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? Our humble response is, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) As we raise our vibrations, evolve our consciousness and awaken to the new season, we should vow never to fall asleep or return to the old days and our old ways. *To God be the Glory... Stay Woke!*

*In gratitude, Yvette and Marvin*

***We humbly and graciously say  
THANK YOU to all the amazing sponsors of  
the 2020 Armstrong Leadership Program  
College Shower Initiative!***

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP  
Synergy Matters, Kristin Smith  
Strategix Management, Jon Crawley  
Fields Marketing  
Credential America  
Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority,  
Wanda Daniels  
Fountain Baptist Church, Octavia Harrison-Hall

***If you are interested in participating in the Armstrong Leadership Program, please contact***

**Yvette Davis Rajput, Director** at work: 804-783-7903, ext. 13, or cell 804-314-2622, or [yrajput@richmondhillva.org](mailto:yrajput@richmondhillva.org)

**Marvin Roane, Assistant Director**, 804-484-0736, or [alp@richmondhillva.org](mailto:alp@richmondhillva.org)

*Like Us on Facebook @ArmstrongLeadership*

# The Judy Project

*Following is an introduction to the Judy Project, an effort to more accurately tell the story of African American history at Richmond Hill and in Richmond. Begun a little over a year ago, it is a work in progress, much research still to be done. It is our hope that you will become a part of the exploration and on-going conversation to uncover the truth and further heal the racial wounds of our city. For more information and to see pictures, visit our website at [thejudyproject.info](http://thejudyproject.info)*

*If you're new to the project, we welcome your involvement beginning here...*

The African American History Project (AAHP) at Richmond Hill is also known as The Judy Project, named for a woman enslaved at the Adams-Taylor house from 1860-1865. The project began in August 2019 when Pam Smith joined the residential community to serve as the new coordinator of the Micah Initiative. Smith, a historian and genealogist, became deeply interested in what happened to both enslaved and free black people who lived and labored on the property from the 1740s through the 1980s. In her spare time, she began archival research at the Library of Virginia and at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture to unearth their lives and she has made several presentations of her preliminary findings to the Richmond Hill staff, residents and Council. In January 2020, as part of Richmond Hill's outreach to the community, Pam also conducted a genealogy workshop on tracing enslaved ancestors designed for the public.

To augment the archival research, Richmond Hill hired Jobie Hill, Historic Preservation Architect and founder of Saving Slave Houses and consultant to Monticello and Montpelier on their slave



houses, to visit Richmond Hill. In December 2019, Hill investigated a particular structure located in the northeast corner of Richmond Hill's garden. The remnant building has been used as a tool shed for some time, though there has often been a looming question – was this structure once a slave house? Based on the information available to her at the time, Jobie Hill made a preliminary determination that the structure, which was significantly modified after slavery ended, is a heavily altered slave house. She made this determination based in part on the one-time existence of a fireplace, which indicates living space (enslaved people typically lived where they worked), and on information from historic maps, among other considerations. Richmond Hill's long-time gardener, Heather Watt, had reported finding artifacts as well as a buried decoratively bonded brick pavement just north of the structure. Hill recommended archaeology to learn more.

In mid-January 2020, archeologists from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), Cultural Resource Analysts (CRA) and the Jamestown Rediscovery Project visited the Richmond Hill slave house. Historic cultural materials were observed on the ground surface surrounding the slave house. Further, "an exploratory ground penetrating radar survey identified

subsurface cultural features both within and around the building" according to the report of Tim Roberts of CRA and Mike Clem from DHR, co-directors of the archaeology project. Phase I shovel tests began in mid-May 2020 and this process was broadcast live on Facebook to an enthusiastic audience.

Richmond Hill has supported the archival research and architectural and archaeological assessments with programming designed to educate and expand awareness of the African American history at Richmond Hill. With generous support from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH), an educational series called Unearthing Buried Stories began in February 2020. In recognition of Black History Month, this series began with a panel, carried live on Facebook, that featured experts Ana Edwards, Laurant Lee, Brian Palmer, Jobie Hill and Tim Roberts. The panel ranked high for Richmond Hill in Facebook page views, an indication of strong audience interest in the black history associated with the Richmond Hill property and with the East End of Richmond. Also at Richmond Hill in May 2020, Lois Leveen, historian and author of *The Secrets of Mary Bowser*, presented (via Zoom) the intriguing story of this enslaved young woman who lived next door to Richmond Hill in the home of Elizabeth Van Lew. During the Civil War, Mary Bowser Richards Denman acted as a spy for the Union. Able to infiltrate Confederate President Jefferson Davis' White House, she passed essential information to Union General Ulysses Grant.

There is much to learn from putting the story of the Richmond Hill property, a noteworthy and sacred space at the heart of the origins of Richmond, in the context of neighborhood, regional and



# School of Race & Justice

"CALLED TO BE RECONCILERS"

## GOALS

### for The Judy Project

*The Judy Project is a part of Richmond Hill's Koinonia School of Race & Social Justice.*

*It aims to:*

1. Help rewrite Richmond Hill's and the city of Richmond's historical narratives by unearthing buried stories about the people who were once enslaved and who worked after slavery ended at Richmond Hill, located in the oldest neighborhood of the city.
2. Preserve and interpret historically significant features, structures and artifacts at Richmond Hill that help to tell the story. Identify and memorialize the people once enslaved on the property.
3. Use genealogical and outreach methods to identify African Americans who might have genealogical ties to this land and invite them to be part of a descendant community.
4. Inspire young people, especially those in the Armstrong Leadership Program at Richmond Hill, to cultivate an interest in history through truth-telling and discover the roots of social injustices that still persist.
5. Promote inclusion of the African American story at Richmond Hill in Richmond Public Schools' new "Real Richmond" curriculum.
6. Encourage family history research as a means of furthering Richmond Hill's mission that includes racial reconciliation and healing.
7. Engage people like you in this ongoing project by commenting on our new site, *thejudyproject.info*, and by assisting us in locating members of the descendant community – relatives of those once enslaved by the former owners of the land on which Richmond Hill now sits.

national history. Our next steps include continuing archival research and archaeology and a re-evaluation of the slave house based on the archaeological findings.



### MARCH 19 | Writing to Tell the Truth

In *Race Matters*, Cornel West highlights the black freedom fighters who converted their sufferings into art to inspire downtrodden communities. West says a characteristic of black artistic excellence is "[t]he freedom to tell the truth in love about one's self and world." This participatory seminar guides participants through black written and musical literature. Using guided prompts, we'll learn from those who have told the "truth in love" before us and consider how we might tell the "truth in love" about our own lives and communities.

### APRIL 15 | Special Juneteenth Family History Fair Pre-Event – *Watch for details!*

### MAY 22 | Generational Healing

This is a unique opportunity to invite God's healing into your family, including the generations that have gone before and the generations that will come after you. The workshop conducted by Rev. Dr. Paula Parker will focus on generational patterns, trauma and healing. Dr. Parker's approach is rooted in the traumatic experience of chattel slavery and the African American spirituality created out of that experience and has deep and powerful connections with other groups and cultures who have experienced historical trauma.

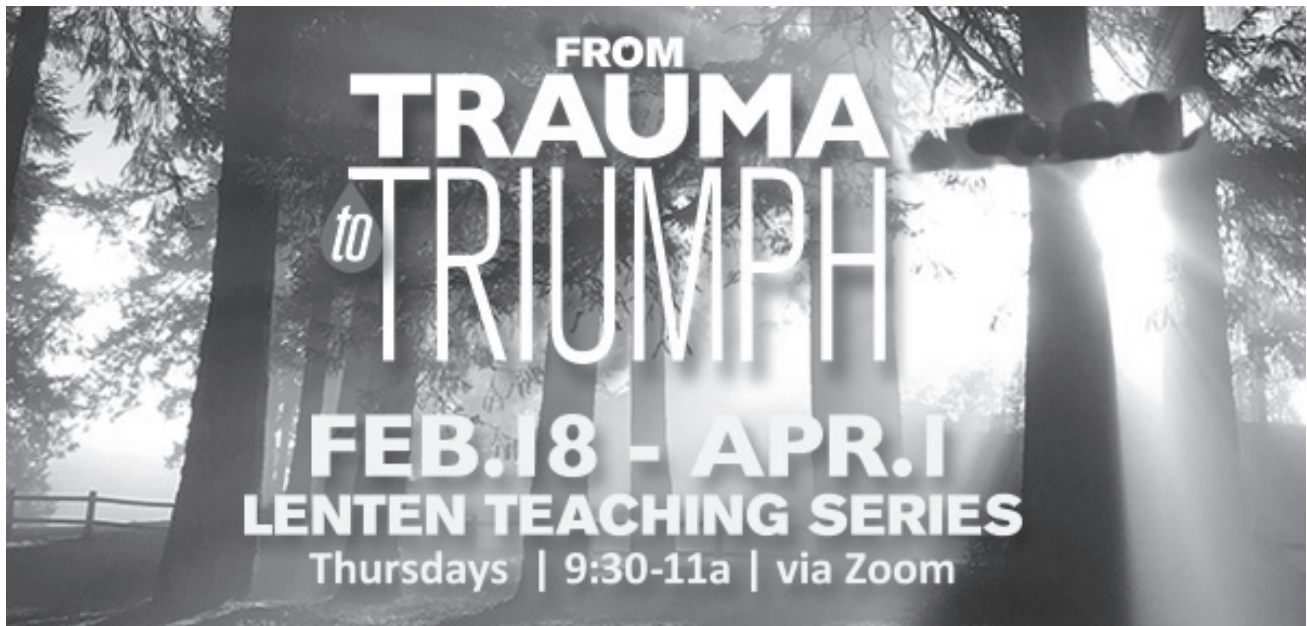
### JUNE 13-18 | The Warmth: A Reading and Writing Intensive

In his autobiography, Richard Wright famously wonders if "the warmth" of a different climate could provide him with the space he needs to "grow differently"--to "bloom." The Warmth is a weeklong, residential, reading and writing intensive hosted at Richmond Hill for black adults between the ages of 18 and 25. Together, we will create a warm but rigorous academic environment for our best creativity, thinking and reflection to grow. The ten accepted applicants should expect daily workshops around topics including: African Diasporic history, Richmond history, personal history and personal development. Contemplative practices of prayer, meditation and shared meals will also cultivate this holistic program.

### JUNE 18-20 | Juneteenth Family History Fair

Are you curious about your family's history but aren't sure how to begin exploring it? Or are you an experienced family historian with much knowledge to share? Mark your calendar for this special Zoom event as we seek to deepen our collective knowledge of the African American experience in Church Hill, from Native American presence and enslavement to the present. We will begin with a keynote presentation by Tony Burroughs, author of *Black Roots* and genealogy consultant for the PBS series *Finding Your Roots*.

*You may sign up for any of these events here: [richmondhillva.org/race](https://richmondhillva.org/race)*



**P**lan to join Co-Pastoral Director, Rev. Dr. Lisa Johnson, *Thursday mornings in Lent, February 18 through April 1, 9:30-11:00 AM, on-line.*

In this Lenten Teaching Series, we will look at the journey of Christ from the wilderness to the Cross. We hope to gain an appreciation of our own personal journeys, places of suffering and moments of triumph.

There will be a weekly scripture, as well as reflection and prayer opportunities to help guide our focus on the experiences of Christ from the wilderness to the Cross. Participation in this teaching will give us a chance to be brought closer to God as we recognize his love towards us in both our trauma and triumphs. Sign up on the website at [richmondhillva.org/lent](https://richmondhillva.org/lent)



## Explore a Call to Community

**O**ur residents will be hosting a virtual open house for anyone sensing a possible call to residency at Richmond Hill. **Join us Tuesday, March 9, 7:00-8:30 PM** for this virtual tour and to learn about the experience of living in community here.

The evening is designed to be an introduction to the discernment process for those feeling called or who are simply curious. If you or someone you know would like to attend, please email us at [RSVP@richmondhillva.org](mailto:RSVP@richmondhillva.org).



# RUAH XIX

## SCHOOL OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE



*New Class begins September 2021*

**R**ichmond Hill will begin a new session of the RUAH School of Spiritual Guidance in September, 2021.

This two-year program is composed of two 48-hour retreats and eight 24-hour retreats for each of two years. The retreats are held on the second weekend of the month, and the rhythm of life of the Richmond Hill Community is the context for these retreats. Prayer and faith sharing are a part of the discipline of all participants. Participants read at least one book each month on the upcoming topic of discussion.

Enrollment in RUAH XIX is open to lay, professional and clergy persons who might feel called to provide spiritual direction in their church, faith community, or as an adjunct minister at Richmond Hill.

**The deadline for applications is May 15th**

*For more information or to apply, please contact DeBorah Cannady, Registrar of the RUAH School of Spiritual Guidance at Richmond Hill (804) 783-7903 or email: [dcannady@richmondhillva.org](mailto:dcannady@richmondhillva.org)*

*Some scholarship assistance is available.*

## Why we give

**S**ome of my favorite conversations with people at Richmond Hill are when I get to say thank you for your support of this place and ministry. Saying “thank you” just feels good, and believe me, our thank you is heartfelt. Your gifts—no matter how small, no matter how large—are sacred. So please hear it now: thank you.

When I ask folks in the community why you give to Richmond Hill, your answers never fail to both inspire and humble me. “Richmond Hill changed my life.” “Sometimes I close my eyes and pretend I’m at Richmond Hill, and just feel at peace.” “I wanted to give what little I have to something important.”

For many of you, Richmond Hill has been part of a transformative period in your life. You’ve told me stories of memories in the Richmond Hill garden, of tough but rich conversations about race and justice in the refectory, of moments of discernment looking out over the city in the cupola.

For others, our online ministry has been a lifeline in times of uncertainty. You’ve told me how, during those early days of the pandemic, you listened every night to the “Song and Prayer to End the Day” on Facebook. Or, you’ve described how you particularly savor when the camera lingers on stained glass windows during our virtual Tuesday night worship.

Still others describe the deep work of racial justice and healing you’ve been inspired to do at Richmond Hill. You’ve described your excitement about embarking on this year’s program for our Koinonia School for Race and Social Justice. You’ve told me about your enthusiasm for the Judy Project, our work uplifting the African American history of enslavement and resilience here on the Hill. You describe your gratitude for the consistent prayers for the transformation of our city.

I came into this position of Associate Pastor for Development with a hunch that, somehow, fundraising could be ministry. If ministry is weaving our lives together with one another and with God, then aligning our gifts and stories together to further God’s healing of our city is surely ministry.

When we give, we give our hopes and prayers for this place and this city. And when we give together, we minister together.

Your gifts in 2020 exceeded our fundraising goal for our Annual Fund and reached the critical mark of \$2 million to close out Phase 1 of our Capital Campaign. Thank you. We now look ahead to a year where the continued generosity of this community—both for our ongoing ministry and as a capital investment in our future—will be essential. We are so glad to be in this ministry with you.

*Rev. Lindsey Franklin  
Associate Pastor for Development*



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**March 2021**

## Metro Richmond at Prayer



**In March:** *Pray for Health Care in  
Metropolitan Richmond.*

**...and in April:** *Pray for the Spirit of the  
Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond.*

**metroprayrva.org**

### RICHMOND HILL MISSION STATEMENT

Richmond Hill is an ecumenical Christian fellowship and intentional residential community who serve as stewards of an urban retreat center within the setting of a historic monastery. Our Mission is to seek God's healing of Metropolitan Richmond through prayer, hospitality, racial reconciliation and spiritual development.

#### RICHMOND HILL'S DAILY CYCLE OF PRAYER

Pray for Metropolitan Richmond Every Day: For the healing of metropolitan Richmond; for the sick and those in our hearts; for the welfare of all our residents; for the establishment of God's order in our community.

**MONDAYS:** Our residents who live in the City of Richmond, the Mayor, Manager, City Council, and School Board. Non-profit organizations and their ministries. All schools: students, teachers, and staff. Day care centers. All who suffer from addiction, dependency, and co-dependency. The Council, residents, and staff of Richmond Hill.

**TUESDAYS:** Our residents who live in Hanover County, the Board of Supervisors, School Board, and Manager. The print and broadcast media. The churches of metropolitan Richmond: members and clergy. All who live in poverty. All who suffer from mental illness.

**WEDNESDAYS:** The Governor of Virginia, the General Assembly, and all who work in State Government. All who work in businesses which provide services to others. All who work in construction. Hospitals and nursing homes: patients, residents, and staff; all who provide health care. Victims of violent crime; all who commit violent crime. All senior residents.

**THURSDAYS:** Our residents who live in Ashland, Hopewell, Colonial Heights, and Petersburg, the town and city Councils and Managers. All who work in banks and finance; all making financial decisions for greater Richmond. Prisons and jails of metropolitan Richmond: prisoners and staff. All who are unemployed or underemployed. All public servants.

**FRIDAYS:** Our residents who live in Henrico County, the Supervisors, School Board, and County Manager. All who work in the manufacturing industry in metropolitan Richmond. The police, fire, and rescue workers. The courts. All

young people. All who hurt, need inner healing, or are unable to love.

**SATURDAYS:** Our residents who live in Chesterfield County, the Supervisors, School Board, and County Manager. All who work in retail trade in metropolitan Richmond, and those who own our businesses. Counselors and spiritual directors. The Sisters of the Visitation of Monte Maria. All victims of abuse; all perpetrators of abuse.

**SUNDAYS:** Our residents who live in the Counties of Charles City, Goochland, Powhatan, and New Kent, the Supervisors, School Boards, and Managers. An end to racism and racial prejudice. All places of prayer or worship: churches, mosques, and synagogues. Universities, colleges, and technical schools. All who seek God.

*We pray daily at Richmond Hill for persons or situations for which our prayers are requested.  
Call us at 804-783-7903.*

Share your comments, or sign up to receive our monthly printed UPDATE newsletter here: [rrumble@richmondhillva.org](mailto:rrumble@richmondhillva.org)  
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