



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Waynesboro

Restoration of Voting Rights for Convicted Felons

By Heather Banks

Recently, I attended a Saturday morning program on this topic. Later, I posted on the UUFW Bulletin Board both sides of a card about restoration of rights of convicted felons after serving complete sentences (including any parole or restitution).

As of March 2021, such restoration in Virginia includes (1) voting rights, (2) right to be a notary, (3) right to serve on a jury, and (4) right to run for office. The right to carry arms is *NOT* restored. Police Departments do not have any input into or knowledge of one's status. The Secretary of the Commonwealth is notified by the Department of Corrections when persons are eligible, but restoration is not automatic.

Persons who may be eligible or need to check their status should go online at www.restore.virginia.gov to check their status, request their rights be restored, and/or request a copy of their grant order. Or they may call the Secretary's office at 804-692-0104.

When I have volunteered to register voters, people often said they have no rights because of a conviction. There is still time to check on status and get rights restored, if they are not already available, and register to vote this year.

The people leading the program in Harrisonburg—where restorative justice has been a priority for years—came from Richmond. They themselves had their rights

restored. Some have accomplished all four of the above rights. They noted Virginia's low threshold for some felonies compared to misdemeanors (e.g., \$200 for shoplifting) means we have many more felons than other states. Thus, one might be surprised at who—store clerks, maintenance workers, or friends' family members—have served such sentences. One of my nieces has a felony record.

The campaign to "Ban the Box" (for felony conviction) on housing and job applications has been quite successful. Now restoration of civic rights has begun but is not automatic. Let's help people who have completed their sentences regain these important rights of citizenship and not serve "life terms" of lost rights.

Service Auction Teaser

It's time to start thinking about our Service Auction fundraiser coming up in November. What will you offer? And how much will you spend to support our Fellowship? The 19th Annual Hike and Gourmet Picnic will definitely be in the catalog. Number 18 was another huge success last Saturday with great food and weather.

