

R10A Task Force – Report to the 228th Annual Convention of Diocese of Virginia

Diocese of Virginia Task Force on Reparations: Charge and Mission

Isaiah 58:9-12

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, “Here I am.” If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

Background

During the 227th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia in 2021, *Resolution R10A – A Resolution to Begin the Work of Reparations in the Diocese of Virginia* was presented and adopted. The Resolution provided a detailed timeline describing the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Virginia’s long history of support for and complicity with chattel slavery, colonialism, violence against Indigenous peoples and the land, segregation, and structural and institutionalized racism, and resolved to set aside an initial \$10 million endowment fund to begin the work of reparations in the Diocese. The resolution called for the appointment of a Reparations Task Force to develop a plan for the investment, growth, and distribution of grant/loans drawn from the proceeds of the endowment. The proposed source of the initial investment is from the sale of unoccupied diocesan properties in the Diocese of Virginia valued at \$19 million, rather than from congregational giving (largely known as the Virginia Plan for Covenantal Giving).

Extensive research throughout the Diocese has determined that many of the churches and other properties of the Diocese were built on land taken from Indigenous peoples and erected using enslaved labor. Other properties were built with wealth garnered through the work of unpaid enslaved workers. This labor was secured through deprivation, intimidation, and violence. The indigenous and enslaved people who helped to build the wealth of the church were never compensated, and descendants continue to feel the economic, emotional, psychological, and spiritual consequences of the sin of slavery and white supremacy through generations of this uncompensated work. They have been denied equity, while the Church continues to benefit.

The work of reparations is about justice, not charity. Repentance and repair are necessary steps toward racial healing.

Our Charge

In the Resolution, the charge given to the Task Force – our primary mission – *is to identify and propose means by which repair may begin for those areas of our structures, patterns and common life by which*

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) within the original bounds of our diocese still carry the burden of theological, social, cultural, economic, and legal injustice, exclusions and biases born out of white supremacy and the legacy of slavery. (The full text of Resolution 10A is available on the Diocese website).¹

What are Reparations?

The Reparations Task Force strives to speak with a unified voice when defining our understanding of Reparations, when presenting our goals, and when exploring the many ways to fruitfully achieve our objectives.

The Oxford Language Dictionary defines Reparations (*noun*) as *the making of amends for a wrong one has done, by paying money to or otherwise helping those who have been wronged*. This definition is accurate, succinct, and without the implication of guilt or punishing the have-nots.

The Episcopal Church presents the work of reparations as a call to bring healing and repair to a broken world, to live out our biblical mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to work to bring about God’s kingdom on earth. In September 2021, the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops issued a report outlining the spiritual grounding of the work of reparations in the church:

Reparations is a matter of faith. It reflects the faith community’s steadfast efforts to foster a “Beloved community.” As such, faith communities are obligated to implement a program of reparations that not simply looks back, but decidedly pushes forward. Reparations, therefore, must involve more than compensating or apologizing for past harms. Instead, they must chart a discernible pathway toward the Beloved Community... And so it is, reparations are fundamental to the very Jesus Movement to which we have been called – as seen in Jesus’ call to “repent” for those who would follow him (Matthew 4:7).²

The Resolution notes that such work is an integral part of our Christian life together, a direct response to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Luke 19:1–10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd, he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

This work is part of the call for racial justice which we have made a primary focus of Diocesan ministry and is one of a long line of Diocesan resolutions over the past 70 years opposing discrimination,

¹ See “Resolution 10A: “A Resolution to Begin the Work of Reparation in the Diocese of Virginia, adopted during the 227th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia.

² *Reparations and Beloved Community, September 2021*

expressing regret for past and present discrimination, and proclaiming that racism is inconsistent with the Gospel and a sin which must be eradicated and the harm repaired, “both materially and relationally.”

How will Reparations be Made?

While keeping this understanding of Reparations in our hearts and minds, we must:

1. identify, secure, and invest funds responsibly so that the principal will generate sustained operating capital to be used for grants, loans, and contributions; and
2. visit every region of the Diocese of Virginia to identify communities and people who are experiencing problems that result from the cultural, social, economic, and legal injustices and the exclusions and biases born out of white supremacy and systemic racism: substandard housing, food deserts, sub-par educational opportunities, lack of fair wage employment, lack of standard basic health care access, and other expressions.

To identify the specific needs to focus on, we will require input and involvement from people directly affected by these conditions. To truly live into one of our Baptismal promises; *to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being*, we must listen to their perspective, rather than assuming we know what they need.

This Reparations Task Force Charge and Mission statement is intended to be a living document and may evolve as the work of the Task Force develops.

The Work of the Reparations Task Force

The Reparations Task Force will meet at least monthly, but more frequently if needed, over an initial period of five years, and will report its progress, findings, and recommendations to the Diocese through quarterly reports, educational materials, and other means of communication. The Task Force has already begun the work of identifying opportunities for non-financial reparations in areas of policies and practices, community engagement, and spiritual life for implementation even before full funding is in place. Our work will be guided and developed by the following Working Groups:

Prayer and Spirituality

This working group is focused on cultivating and developing opportunities for the Task Force and the entire Dioceses to engage in the ministry of prayer for the work of reparation in our Diocese. This includes the assignment of leaders to each of our meetings to open and close our gatherings with prayer/meditation. This group will also work toward the cultivation of spiritual practices to deepen our work of repairing the breaches and invite the Diocese to engage with us.

Education, Theology and Ethics

This working group is focused on the development and sharing of education, theology, and ethical presentations on reparations, as defined by the Task Force, and its import for the work of building and sustaining the Beloved Community within the Episcopal Church. This is to include the development, support, and promotion of regional and diocese-wide forums and other opportunities.

Finance and Investment

This working group is tasked with the responsibility of exploring opportunities for the procurement and proper investment of funds to constitute the initial investment of \$10 million. This working group will work in collaboration with the Diocesan Treasurer, with the support of the Trustees of the Funds.

Legal, Constitution and Canons

This working group is responsible for ensuring that the work of the Task Force is in alignment with the Constitution and Canons of the Church and will work in collaboration with the Finance and Investment working group to ensure legal and canonical compliance.

Community Wisdom, Arts and Engagement

This working group is responsible for ensuring that voices, wisdom, and perspectives from the wider community are included in our work. This group will question how the wider community, beyond the Episcopal Church, engages itself in the work of reparation, constantly questioning who is missing from the table of conversation and decision-making. This group will also engage the work of reparation that is present in stories and narratives through art and other non-traditional forms.

Communication and Evangelism

This working group will focus on sharing the work of the Task Force with the Diocese, through diocesan communiques and other forms. This group will support the work of other working groups in organizing all the marketing and communications of the Task Force to the Diocese. This group will also work to identify regions and areas throughout the Diocese where education on reparation is needed.

R10A Task Force Co-Chairs

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