Episcopal Diocese *of* Washington | Diócesis Episcopal *de* Washington

Report of the Committee on Diocesan Reparations
To the Annual Convention of the Diocese of Washington
December 2023

Background

In mid-2019, an informal working group composed of members from congregations within around the Episcopal Diocese of Washington ("EDOW" or "Diocese") began meeting to consider what it would mean for the Diocese of Washington to undertake a project of reparation for its participation in, and benefit from, anti-Black racism. The initial goal of this group was to investigate the financial legacy of chattel slavery in the Diocese. The group developed a proposal to commission and share a research project investigating the history of Diocesan antecedents and their entanglements with the institution of chattel slavery.

Later that year, the Diocesan council approved funds to support this research initiative and commissioned the informal working group as a task force of the Diocese. In addition to the history research project, the Reparations Task Force commissioned a survey and qualitative analysis of institutional reparations initiatives around the country over the last ten years to glean and discern best practices in this work. The Reparations Task Force also convened a community of congregational research partners, who had committed to research and share their own parochial histories with racism. As information was uncovered and shared, the Reparations Task Force, working in collaboration with the School for Christian Leadership and Formation, developed a series of adult education sessions to help congregations of the Diocese share this knowledge.

These educational initiatives culminated in "Repairing the Breach," a day-long symposium on reparations for congregational leaders in the Diocese of Washington.

At the 2023 Diocesan Convention, the Reparations Task Force presented a resolution formally commissioning a Committee on Diocesan Reparations ("Committee" or "Reparations Committee"). The resolution passed with an overwhelming majority. The Committee, resulting from the resolution, includes two working groups: a Policy Working Group and an Education Working Group. The resolution charged the Committee with 1) continuing the work of researching and sharing the Diocesan history of its legacy of slavery and subsequent embrace of anti-Black racism, and 2) presenting a reparations proposal outlining transformational policies and structural changes for the consideration of Convention in 2025.

II. 2023 Accomplishments

In the year since its creation, the Reparations Committee has undertaken significant efforts and initiatives to push the work forward.

A. **Review of Institutional Reparations Programs and Lessons Learned**

The Policy Working Group has reviewed and researched the 2022 survey and qualitative analysis of institutional reparations initiatives from around the country. In doing so, members are considering best practices, lessons learned, and potential models for reparations in the Diocese, with an eye to the specific context, history and needs of our congregations and communities in the Washington, DC, area. With these elements in mind, the Policy Working Group has begun workshopping possible reparations proposals to present to the convention in 2025.

B. Survey of Racial Justice Ministries

The Education Working Group conducted a survey of current parochial racial ministries within the Diocese. Survey topics included educational programs, worship review with a racial lens, equity policies, and advocacy work. To date, 72 congregations, or 85 percent, of the Diocese responded. (Please see the Reparations section in the EDOW website for complete survey data).

C. Communications: Creating the Foundation for Current and Future Education and Outreach

During 2023, our Communication Team, in collaboration with EDOW Communications, developed and implemented a plan for building the foundation for the Committee's outreach to, and communication with, parishes and parishioners. The key elements of this communications plan focus on the Reparations section of the EDOW website, email communications, and social media.

1. **Reparations section on the EDOW website**

   The Communication Team redesigned the Reparations section of the EDOW website and greatly expanded the content available; with the goal of providing a comprehensive and easy-to-navigate resource on our reparations work in the Diocese. The section is designed to grow as the work of the Committee continues and new information is shared with the Diocese. EDOW Communications approved and implemented all updates.

   The new pages within this section of the website include:

   a. News and Events: This page provides links to all newsletter articles from the Reparations Committee published in the EDOW Bulletin in 2023. It also provides a comprehensive collection of videos, presentations, and other materials from the October 2022 EDOW event: "Repairing the Breach: A Symposium on Reparations" All future reparations events and news regarding the Committee's work will be featured on this page.

b. **Reparations Training and Educational Resources:** This page highlights “Repairing the Breach,” the two-session video curriculum developed by the Reparations Task Force as well as the EDOW “Race and Reckoning: An Exploration into Reparations” symposium attended by 400 participants. Future reparations education events will also be featured on this page.

c. **Parish History Projects:** This page provides resources for the beginning parish historian to conduct a parish history project. Information on the Congregational History Partners is also available, who meet monthly to support each other's work. The page includes video testimonials from three parishes as well as a Parish History Spotlight, which will be rotated regularly.

d. **Research on Reparations:** This page highlights two research projects sponsored by EDOW: (1) “An Analysis of Current Reparations Programs in the United States”, and (2) “Historical Involvement with Enslaved and Free Black Populations in the Eighth Root Parishes of the Diocese of Washington, 1692-1864”. This page also provides a link to an archival records management document developed by the Episcopal Church, “Consulting the Past Through the Archival Record: A Guide for Researching the Impact of Slavery on Church Life and African Americans”.

e. **Committee on Diocesan Reparations:** This page lists each member of the Committee and their home parish, including ex-officio membership, and our EDOW staff liaison.

2. **Email Communication:** We launched reparations email communications in the fall with a special email from Bishop Mariann Budde regarding the survey, and a follow-up email sent after the regional gatherings to all who attended. In 2024, in collaboration with EDOW Communications, we will expand our email footprint with one article per month in the EDOW Bulletin (e-newsletter).

3. **Social Media (EDOW Facebook and Instagram Accounts)**: The Communication Team worked with EDOW Communications on a visual identity for our social media posts, similar to identities created for EDOW’s Black History Month and Pride month series on its social accounts. Starting in November 2023, EDOW posted content from the Reparations Committee once a week, (on Monday), to highlight our activities, build engagement, and encourage visitors to explore the reparations content available on the EDOW website.

III. 2024 Initiatives

The Reparations Committee is dedicated to collecting quantitative and qualitative data. We are also focused on engaging and empowering parishioners and members of the Diocese with opportunities at different levels for participation in a reparations program.

A. **Listening Sessions on Reparations:** The Reparations Committee will select several dates and times for virtual and/or in-person events to host EDOW clergy and lay people; providing the time and a safe space for them to voice their concerns, questions, and comments on reparations and enable the Committee to actively listen and address them.

B. **Individual Story-Sharing to Identify Harms:** The Reparations Committee will conduct events to enable individuals with stories of personal hurts to speak and be heard. The events may also include speakers who are prepared to tell their stories, as well as Diocesan leaders and clergy who will actively listen with open hearts. LEGO® Serious Play® may be part of the format, as it is intended to facilitate difficult discussions.

C. **Parish Story Circles:** The Reparations Committee will canvas EDOW members to gather, hear, and share stories about EDOW's past Black parish that closed due directly or indirectly to systemic anti-Black bias, institutional racism, and related factors. Once stories are identified, the Committee will conduct an event(s) either virtually or in-person to explore (in a safe environment) where breaches have occurred in terms of historic Black congregations. From there, the Committee will gather information regarding the harm, the impact of the harm, and what restitution could or would look like.

D. **Claggett Retreat:** The retreat scheduled for February 2 - 4, 2024, will provide an opportunity for the Reparations Committee to work together to develop a strategic plan and deliverables for 2024.

E. **First Draft Report (June 2024):** Once all engagement concludes, e.g., research, listening sessions, story sharing, etc., the Reparations Committee's first reparations proposal draft is due. The Policy Working Group will determine what a Gospel-oriented approach to a reparations policy looks like by addressing those Diocesan programs or recommendations that can be advanced to EDOW to facilitate reparations to the parishes, parishioners, other people, and/or communities harmed by the Diocese.

F. **Final Draft Report (1 October 2024):** The Policy Working Group will submit a final report and make a presentation to Diocesan Convention 2025. Analysis will include, but is not limited to topics such as:
    1. What is the scope of harm/redress to which EDOW will commit itself?
    2. What are the mechanisms available to ensure EDOW remains accountable to any approved reparations policy?

3. Will the focus of reparations also include policy proposals that change the culture of EDOW from the top down?

G. Expansion of Parish History Projects: The Education Working Group continues to encourage each EDOW parish to examine its history through the lens of race and racism. The Congregation History Partners group offers a safe and supportive space for parishes to begin this work. Although the focus of this Committee is reparations at the Diocesan level, it is impossible to truly understand the need for reparations without a thorough knowledge of the history of each EDOW parish.

H. Completion of EDOW's Maryland Parish History Project: By December 2024, Franklin Robinson will complete his research project titled, "Historical Involvement with Enslaved and Free Black Populations in the Eighth Root Parishes of the Diocese of Washington, 1692-1864". This work explores the participation of the eight Diocesan antecedents in the institution of chattel slavery in Maryland.

IV. Developing Reparations Policy Proposals for the Diocese of Washington

The Policy Working Group began developing a proposal for a Diocesan Reparation Policy in the fall of 2023. As part of a proposed reparations policy document, the working group compiled a list of the many complex issues that must be addressed in the policy. The list is based on a review of other church reparations initiatives, as well as a review of other source materials, such as *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*, by D. Kwon and G. Thompson.

Questions under consideration include but are not limited to:

A. Wat time period should be taken into consideration?
Some reparations programs focused on harms to enslaved people prior to the end of the Civil War. Others focus on the Jim Crow era (1865-1960s), while others focus on harms done in recent times (circa 1970s to the present).

B. Should the policies include parishes that are now in the Diocese of Washington, but were previously in the Diocese of Maryland?
While the content of this reparations policy proposal will be within the context of harms done by the Diocese, it is important to specify whether the focus includes the era of slavery, as that occurred prior to the creation of the Diocese of Washington.

C. Who was harmed?
To develop a fair and transparent reparations policy, especially one that includes restitution (i.e., financial disbursements), we must identify the criteria used to determine recipients. We must also specify whether recipients will include individuals, parishes, or other organizations (e.g., community-based non-profits and educational organizations, as some reparations programs

have done).

D. What types of harms should be considered? The list is potentially endless. Beyond the terrible harms associated with slavery, harms directly attributable to the Diocese must also be determined. These harms may include reduced education, employment opportunities, limited income and assets, health status and healthcare access, property loss, some of which continue to affect individuals and parishes.

E. Who is responsible for the harms?
The focus of this proposal, as per the January 2023 Diocesan resolution, centers around harms committed by the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. Should the focus also include parishes or individuals? If so, what does that responsibility look like?

F. What types of reparations should be considered?
While the Diocese has specified that there will be a financial commitment to the work of reparations, the amount available for restitution and redress is not yet clear. We know that no amount of money could ever completely repair all the harms done through 400 years of American slavery, and the subsequent legacy of segregation and discrimination. In addition to financial reparations as part of the policy proposal, should there be other non-financial reparations and what should those be? Examples of financial and non-financial reparations may include:

1. Hiring forensic accountants trained to research organizational finances so that there is a clear accounting of what EDOW did with assets of Black parishes that closed. Once the report from the forensic accountant is completed, public statements of lament, apology, and repentance would be appropriate to begin facilitating reconciliation.
2. Upon request, replacing stained-glass windows in historically Black churches with more culturally appropriate figures.
3. Developing curricula on EDOW's racial history for all EDOW schools and for Christian Education.
4. Developing special exhibits to increase awareness.
5. Naming of special sites or remembrance and reconciliation.

G. Who will provide the funds for financial reparations?
The Diocese has clearly stated that any financial reparations funding will be from the Diocese, and not from individual churches. This does not preclude any parish from establishing a reparations fund and making disbursements if it so chooses.

H. What should the size of financial reparations be?
As previously noted, financial reparations can never fully compensate for the harms of the slavery and Jim Crow eras, in addition to economic disparities that continue to exist. However, it is critical that a reparations package go beyond small "symbolic" amounts. Reparations should be substantial enough to repair some of the harm that

has been done, within the scope of what is feasible.

I. **What should be the method and source of control for disbursing funds or other forms of reparations, and who is responsible for ensuring that funds are used appropriately?**
What oversight, reporting, and accountability for fund disbursal will be implemented to ensure that funds are used effectively and appropriately? Perhaps more importantly, who will make those determinations? Do they need to be made at all? If a financial reparations package is disbursed, there is a case for adopting a "hands-off" approach and allowing established churches and other organizations to use the funds as they see fit.

J. **Who will receive reparations?**
The process of identifying who was harmed will help to identify who should receive reparations. Should the recipients be individuals, parishes, or non-profit organizations that work in the affected communities? If individuals, which individuals? If parishes, which parishes? If non-profits, which non-profits? What decision process is needed to identify them, and how can conflicts between individuals and parishes be avoided?

K. **What is the time frame for the EDOW reparations process**?
Will this program be time-limited, or will EDOW develop a continual process to monitor harms and the need for restitution?

It is clear from this list of important issues that developing a transparent, fair, and effective reparations program is a serious and thoughtful undertaking. At the same time, keeping all of these issues in mind is critical to defining the work ahead. The list can be used as a discussion guide for the policy and education working groups, but it also can be used by parishes and other committees of the Diocese as we all work toward becoming a Beloved Community truly committed to speaking truth to power.