



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

May 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

We know that God has a great vision for all of us - the dream of our becoming and living as a *Beloved Community*. In this dream of God's, all people experience dignity and abundant life, and see themselves and others as beloved children of God. The dream is deeply rooted in our Christian faith and expressed in our Baptismal covenant. It is a hope that promises transformation throughout the Church and the world by following the way of Christ, by actually striving to live in the way Christ taught us—respecting and loving every person, and advocating for true peace and true justice.

In the Diocese of Maryland, we are faithfully living into our vision of being a community of love. The imperative to love finds its roots in that long-awaited hope that God dreamed even at the foot of Mount Sinai, where the Israelites – a battered nation of freed slaves - were becoming the called people of God.

People in the United States, in the Episcopal Church and in the Diocese of Maryland have inherited our share of breaches and broken places, especially with our legacy of slavery (See Appendix A). For generations the bodies of black and brown people did not belong to themselves, but were bred, used, and sold for the purpose of attaining wealth. Not only did our nation prosper under this evil institution, but our beloved Episcopal Church profited as well. However, as Jesus teaches us, a structure with a broken foundation cannot hope to stand.

The subject of reparations is mired in emotion; it is often mischaracterized and certainly largely misunderstood. It is a complex issue that involves economic, political, and sociological dimensions that are difficult to grasp without a willingness to engage more deeply than having a quick emotional response to the word. The issue highlights the racial divide among us, creates varying levels of resentment and suspicion, and accentuates a pain that has long plagued our country since its founding.

Reparations, at its base, means to repair that which has been broken. It is not just about monetary compensation. An act of reparation is the attempt to make whole again, and/or to restore; to offer atonement; to make amends; to reconcile for a wrong or injury.

Isn't that our work in this broken world? As the Church, our primary mission is *"restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ"* (BCP, p. 855). This is our primary call and charge, and we take on this responsibility by praying, worshipping, proclaiming the Gospel and promoting justice and love. Our mission is further met by understanding and living out our Baptismal Covenant (BCP, p. 416), not only with one another, but in the

world as witnesses to God's love for all of God's people. We reaffirm these covenant vows whenever we baptize, confirm, or receive into this communion.

Our own commitment to this vision will require honest reflection and a holy devotion to reconciliation. Forgiveness alone is but one step in the long journey to reconcile our past with the present. We need to *repair* the broken places and wounds that we have all inherited from centuries of the degrading treatment of our fellow human beings.

The Episcopal Church, at its 78th General Convention in 2015, made a commitment to building the *Beloved Community*, in part through a devotion to racial healing. The four steps of the 'Beloved Community' process are *Telling the Truth; Proclaiming the Dream; Practicing the Way of Love; and Repairing the Breach*. Isaiah prophesied that we will be "repairers of the breach" (Isaiah 58:12) as we loosen the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free and share our bread with the hungry. This letter and accompanying materials lay out the beginning steps of what our commitment to "repair" – *reparations* - can look like in the Diocese of Maryland.

While we take our own share in God's blessing through the saving work of Jesus Christ, we remain responsible to the call to care for those who are vulnerable, and we must continually be engaged in the work of reconciliation and repair. This is what being a community of love means. There is a heavy burden that comes with being called the people of God, and we must be willing to bear that burden to do those things that God says are important—to care for the poor, to welcome the stranger, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Otherwise we risk becoming hypocrites or false prophets.

While the *history* of slavery is widely understood in the U.S., the *continuing impact* of its legacy is less understood – even in the Church. Some Episcopal bishops, clergy and laity stood up for the fair and equal treatment of African American slaves and free people. Bishops from James Kemp in the early 19th century to William Whittingham in the latter half of the 19th century to Robert Ihloff in the 21st century; and many white lay people and clergy, such as Mary Miller and the Rev. Bill Fallowfield (see Appendix B), worked for the well-being of African Americans as equal to all children of God. More often, however, Episcopal bishops, clergy and laity *supported* segregation of diocesan schools, churches, and institutions through the 1960's. Episcopal clergy and diocesan leadership were active participants in the continued segregation of housing and schools in Baltimore City and across the State of Maryland. The symptoms and wounds of that old sin continue to poison our society and threaten the health of the Body of Christ of which we are all a part.

After the hard-fought abolition of slavery, there was a fateful denial in our nation of reparations for freed African American people for their centuries of undeserved bondage, even though in many instances white plantation owners received reparations in the form of compensation for the losses they incurred from the Civil War and the end of slavery. Racism and greed fueled that basic injustice, and those attitudes have poisoned race

relations ever since. From the implementation of Jim Crow laws, lynching, segregation, redlining, job discrimination and unequal funding for majority African American school districts, to our own segregated church demographics, we see that we have not fully reckoned with our past. We are not yet fully a community of love.

The concepts of power and powerlessness have strong emotional impact for each of us. Most of us experience one or both during our lifetimes. The ability to have control of our lives can give us a general sense of security and well-being, while the inability to control our lives leads to a sense of powerlessness, to insecurity, depression and anger. There are consequences to constantly feeling powerless. When we have limited agency, it is incredibly hard to build a life of success, security, and love. Repeated exposure to trauma can lead to post traumatic stress disorder, which only enhances the feeling of powerlessness, as well as further social isolation. As we know from our own family lives, psychological damage from all forms of abuse, verbal and physical, trauma and addiction, penetrates generations. Living under these circumstances is not a recipe for success. This simply isn't part of God's dream for us. We Christians are called to weep with our God in sorrow over the love denied our human family members. We are called to weep, pray, love and then act—to repair and reconcile.

It is time for all of us to understand how power gained by force and wielded unevenly impacts African Americans in this country. We can all celebrate the tremendous strides that have been made in racial attitudes in our nation, and we are very proud of the accomplishments of many individuals who have overcome great odds to achieve success. But for the millions of descendants of American slaves who are trapped in a pernicious cycle of hopelessness, poverty and rage due to their real experience of racial segregation, redlining, inferior schools and the like, the widespread assumption that *everyone* can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps is a long way from being accurate. They know that the odds are against them on so many fronts: they cannot change their environment, and they cannot change the color of their dark skin.

All of these factors have played into creating a lack of power for brown and black people. This lack is a social problem: it goes beyond an individual's character and will. It is time for all of us to move towards a place of acceptance of humans who want the same things we do, but who have not been found to be worthy of those desires by the dominant society. Self-examination, learning about how the self reacts emotionally to those who are different and acknowledging preconceived expectations of another race or culture that lie inside the human being is vital to creating an environment where communication between the races can exist (See Appendix C).

Beloved, it will be by our lives and actions with regard to racial reconciliation that we will speak most prophetically to the world. In this way, we are writing a "living Epistle" to the whole Church. This holy missive was begun with God's call of freedom to the people of Israel in Egypt, continued with Jesus' proclamation of freedom to the captives in the

synagogue, and Paul's invitation to his friend Philemon to free his slave Onesimus. It continues through the action and dedication of our forebears in the Civil Rights era who were convicted by the Gospel imperative of love and justice.

The biblical mandate to justice (see Appendix B) is to hold leadership accountable for the fair and equal treatment of all God's people. All of us have been taught to love everyone regardless of their race and human condition. However, we must come to acknowledge that **there can be no love without justice, and there can be no justice without some form of repairing an injustice.** Through prayerful and dedicated study, combined with deep discussion and loving actions, I believe we can do the work of repair. Through reparations, we can be leaders in the long-awaited process of reconciliation, of creating God's dream for us—a truly *Beloved Community*.

Finally, please know that our conversation on reparations in the Church is, and should be, different from the ones we hear in the political arena. For us, "repairing the breach" is not a mandate from a government or leader, but a mandate from our God to commit to the rebuilding of a relationship between the world and God, between individuals and communities and to seek a better world for our children. The Sutton Scholars® High School Enrichment Program is a good example of a type of reparations. This diocesan program is designed to help inner city youth, particularly black youth, to realize their life's hopes and dreams, and equip them to become the young men and women that God intended them to be. It empowers them not to fall prey to the many traps that often confront them – including the prevailing belief that they are "less than" others in our society. Programs such as this have proven to be a significant contribution to helping young black youth achieve success and stay out of the criminal justice system. These kinds of programs are invaluable; might the diocese fund such initiatives as these to repair and heal the past?

Please join me in studying the issue of reparations and prayerfully consider how *all* of us in the Diocese of Maryland – of whatever race, background or national origin - can together embark on this journey of repairing the breach we've all inherited from our nation's past. Attached are other resources to help us all engage in this work together, including a history of the legacy of slavery in our diocese; a look at biblical and theological views on slavery; a description of the psychological ramifications of the powerlessness created by slavery; and, a series of reflection questions. A workshop prepared by the diocesan Reparations Committee will be offered this fall. I urge you to enter into this holy work with me. As a community of love we will collaborate, question and discuss how we heal the past through our present actions. In so doing, we all proclaim "the message of reconciliation to which God has called us as ambassadors for Christ." (II Corinthians 5:18-20)

Blessings and peace,

+Eugene

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