

# Report on Listening Gatherings:

## Charting the Long Road Toward Reparations



Presented by the Subcommittee on Reparations  
Racial Justice Commission  
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

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## **Introduction and Overview**

The Diocesan Convention of November 2021 adopted a resolution, [\*Charting the Long Road Towards Reparations\*](#), which stated that 2022 would be a year of study and discernment “in the name of repentance, reconciliation, and accountability to the descendants of enslaved Africans and their communities.”

An important part of this process was to hear what the members of our diocesan community had to say when they heard the word *reparations*. From May 2 through May 21, 2022, the Subcommittee on Reparations of the diocesan Racial Justice Commission held nine regional online *Reparations Listening Gatherings*. These gatherings were about listening to the voices of the diocese - not debating or arguing points of view but listening to each other. Attendees were asked to come prepared to share their feelings, thoughts, concerns, and questions about reparations. During the three-week period, more than 115 people attended, including clergy and lay members of the diocese.

This report is intended to share the major themes as well as the commonly asked questions shared during these gatherings.

## **Five Main Themes**

Five main themes emerged from what was expressed in the nine Listening Sessions. The themes are as follows: *A Strong Sense of Support*; *A Commitment to Repair and Develop Just Relationships*; *A Desire for Ongoing Sustainability*; *A Sense of Concern*; and *A Deep Sense of Hope*. Immediately below each theme are supporting statements culled from the Listening Sessions. Notice that what evolved is closely aligned with our Diocesan Mission Strategy.

### ***A Strong Sense of Support***

- Embrace the need to repair and begin the journey to amend by facing and acknowledging the harm that has been inflicted upon African American and Afro Caribbean people.
- Commit to ensuring significant monetary repair in what we do.
- Ensure that those who were and are harmed benefit from the Reparations Fund in a meaningful way.

- Prioritize leadership by those who were and are harmed in the decision making for how funding decisions are made.

### ***A Commitment to repair and develop just relationships***

- This is a journey that not everyone has and or will embrace. With that said, we must commit to educating ourselves and others with honesty about the current breach in relationships within our daily life structures.
- This will be difficult and may take a long time. Regrettably, not all will believe that repairing relationships is necessary.
- There are witnesses in our diocese who have experienced monetary and non-monetary acts of reparations who testify how meaningful it was to them and the benefit such acts of reparation were to their relationship to a body that acknowledges their pain.
- Reparations will not compete with or take away from established ministries. This will enhance our ministries and their efficacy.
- Continue the work of repair for harm caused to Indigenous Peoples alongside that of harm to enslaved Africans.

### ***A Desire for Ongoing Sustainability***

- Transparency in addressing maintenance the fund over time
- Ongoing Accountability regarding decision making processes
- Incorporation of ongoing education about how we as a diocese approach our relationships across race through our formation tools and courses for clergy and lay.

### ***A Sense of Concern***

- Nothing will come of this resolution.
- Struggling parishes who are trying to remain open may experience this as being forgotten or not seen.
- There are financially strained suburban parishes.
- The historically Black churches will benefit and not have to contribute monetarily.
- This is another step toward co-opting their "faith".
- Not to take away from the strong sense of this is the right thing for us to do, but fear was expressed.

### ***A Deep Sense of Hope***

- Gratitude that our diocese is joining others not only in talking but also in actively engaging in reparations.
- Excitement in be involved and ready to actively engage in doing the work.
- Joy that this is a great start to the healing process.

## **Commonly Asked Questions**

These five main themes capture the overall arch of the nine Listening Gatherings, which were intended strictly for listening and not for dialogue or answering questions. A number of questions were voiced, which are addressed in the 2022 Resolution on Reparations which has been put forth by the Racial Justice Commission.

- What are reparations? Are reparations only monetary? What non-monetary forms of reparations are available to us to participate?
- Who will determine how the monies are spent? Will our parish apportionment increase? How was this amount determined?
- Who will serve on the committee for this? Who will have oversight for this committee?
- Why are we targeting this particular group? Why aren't other marginalized groups included in this effort?
- Can I contribute to this fund?
- Will Mission Initiative grant recipients be negatively impacted by this fund? What will happen if parish giving decreases?

## **Closing Remarks & Next Steps**

These Listening Gatherings were an opportunity for members of the Diocese of Massachusetts to have their voices heard. The Gatherings continued the ongoing work of the Racial Justice Commission, who have created many resources for the diocese as we do the work of becoming God's Beloved Community. The Reparations Toolkit, the study series *What is Truth?*, and the Listening Gatherings are all the first of many steps on our shared journey as people of faith working together to fully live out our baptismal covenant of respecting the dignity of every human being. Our Mission Strategy invites us to become the people we long to be, the people God created us to be.

A consistent desire to see repair work for Indigenous and Native Peoples was voiced in these gatherings. To that end, a small working group has begun this work. It is clear that while there are similarities in the stories of the impact of imperialism and white supremacy has had on Africans and Native Peoples, the stories are different and will require different pathways and structures in the road toward repair.

Where will we go now? There are many upcoming ways in which we can live into this deep call: passing current and future resolutions; an upcoming collection of stories of harm; further Listening Sessions for youth; a new study series, and a history project. How might we each be called to join in this work? As we continue this long journey, we are called to work together for justice. May we take many next steps as we look forward to our future together.