

**Diocese of New Jersey Reparations Task Force
Report to 238th Diocesan Convention**

Co-Conveners: Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach, Canon Annette Buchanan, and Canon Noreen Duncan

Members: The Rt. Rev. Chip Stokes, Mr. Vernon Anthony, The Rev. Greg Bezilla, The Rev. Allison Burns-LaGreca, The Rev. Susanna Cates, Mr. Willie Coleman, The Rev. Joanne Epply-Schmidt, Ms. Clare Gutwein, Mr. Charles Hughes, The Rev. Canon Brian Jemmott, The Rev. Hyvenson Joseph, The Rev. Andy Moore, The Rev. Francisco Pozo, Mr. Joe Rodriguez, The Rev. Scott Russell, The Rev. Kije Mugisha Rwamasirabo, The Rev. Deacon Clive Sang, The Rev. Beth Rauen Sciano, The Rev. Sharon Sutton, The Rev. Megan Thomas, The Rev. Allen Wakabayashi, The Rev. Canon Richard Wrede, The Rev. Jack Zamboni, The Rev. Ed Zelley

Consultant: The Rev. Charles Wynder

The Reparations Task Force was convened following overwhelming support for Resolution 2020-3 at the November 2020 Diocesan Convention.

Be it resolved, That the 236th Convention of the Diocese of New Jersey reaffirm the will of The Episcopal Church General Convention to take action toward racial justice, healing, and reconciliation;

and be it Further resolved, That the Diocese of New Jersey establish a Task Force to initiate and oversee a multi-year process to examine our sins, complicity, and financial benefits through the history of slavery and its legacy continuing to contemporary practices, and to recommend appropriate actions for the Diocese

In 2006, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed Resolution A-123 calling on the Church to “*acknowledge its history of participation in this sin and the deep and lasting injury which the institution of slavery and its aftermath have inflicted on society and on the Church.*” The General Convention urged every Diocese “*to collect and document...detailed information in its community on (a) the complicity of The Episcopal Church in the institution of slavery and in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination and (b) the economic benefits The Episcopal Church derived from the institution of slavery.*”

Bishop Stokes appointed Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach, Canon Annette Buchanan, and Canon Noreen Duncan as co-conveners. The stated goal developed by the co-conveners was:

In addition to outlining objectives, timeline and tasks, our expectation is to engage the Diocese to journey with us and support this process through surveys, events, conferences, liturgies of lamentations, etc. We also anticipate being engaged in historical research on this topic across our nation, denomination, and diocese with summaries to inform the outcome of the meaning and impact of reparation for the Diocese and an ongoing Reparations Commission.

Members used the following working definition of reparations from the United Church of Christ:

Reparations is the process to remember, repair, restore, reconcile and make amends for wrongs that can never be singularly reducible to monetary terms. The process of reparations is “an historical

reckoning involving acknowledgement that an offence against humanity was committed and that the victims have not received justice that is due them.”

Task Force members were required to have an understanding of systemic racism from accredited anti-racism training, meet monthly, and actively work in their assigned working team toward agreed upon objectives. The work of the Reparations Task Force helped establish the foundation and framework for a Reparations Commission that will lead the diocese in the years ahead to repairing a sin not addressed, working with entities of the diocese to discern appropriate remedies and reparations.

Task Force members participated in education, research, resource-sharing, discussion, and advocacy. Members presented on reparations and the history of enslavement in NJ, specifically in the contexts of Rutgers University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton University, Trenton, and Somerset County. The Task Force’s justice work was reinforced through Scripture and prayer provided by Chaplains the Rev. Kije Mugisha Rwamasirabo and the Rev. Joanne Epply-Schmidt.

Task Force members were assigned to one of four working teams: Diocesan Education/ Engagement, Funding/Finance, Research/History, and Advocacy. The work of these teams will continue as this effort transitions from Task Force to Commission.

Two webinars were organized for the diocese, both moderated by the Rev. Charles Wynder, consultant to the Reparations Task Force:

Journeying Towards Reparations on May 25, 2021. Presenters: The Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lapsley, Dean and VP for Academic Affairs and Professor of Old Testament, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Grey Maggiano, Rector, Memorial Episcopal Church, Baltimore, MD.

Journeying to Reparations II on September 28, 2021, with presenters: Dr. Kendra Boyd, Assistant Professor of History at Rutgers University, Camden, and Dr. Jesse Bayker, Research Project Manager and Digital Archivist at the Scarlet and Black Research Center, Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice, Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

The Task Force welcomed and learned from the co-chairs of the Diocese of New York’s Reparations Committee, the Rev. Richard Witt and Cynthia Copeland, Ph.D. This neighboring diocese has been at the work of Reparations circa 2006.

Some Diocese of New York Reparations Committee resources: <https://diocesenj.org/mission-and-outreach/social-concerns/reparations-for-slavery/>

With the bishop’s encouragement, the co-conveners and Advocacy team members worked with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice to convene more than 20 interfaith allies and nonprofits committed to the creation of a statewide Reparations Task Force. NJ Faith Allies for Reparations: Say the Word contacted the NJ Governor and legislators directly, organized three rallies attended by more than 400 people, and drafted a petition signed by over 300 people. NJ Faith Allies’ advocacy and educational outreach in support of a statewide Reparations Task Force continues in 2022.

Throughout the state of New Jersey, people are beginning to recognize the layers of harm caused by the incomplete and inaccurate history we have inherited about our state. Enslavement of people of African descent in New Jersey began during the settler colonialism of the Dutch West India Company’s New Netherland colony in 1621. When the English took over the colony in 1665, Dutch farmers were appeased by the continuation, maintenance, and expansion of enslavement and its economic benefits

for the oppressors. During the 18th century, efforts to abolish slavery in New Jersey were opposed by state legislators from slaveholding counties including Bergen, Somerset, and Monmouth.

In 1804, New Jersey was the last Northern state to take a step toward the abolition of slavery with the passage of An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. This act continued the system of enslavement using the concept of “slaves for a term.” It freed no one. The act determined that people born to enslaved parents after July 4, 1804, would be enslaved for 21 years if female and 25 if male. This law was not amended to free people born before this date, unlike similar gradual emancipation laws in other Northern states. Enslavement of New Jerseyans of African descent continued until the 13 Amendment of the Constitution was ratified in 1865 by other states. New Jersey had laws restricting enslaved and free Black people, significantly limiting people’s ability to gather, travel, sell goods, and own property or buildings. In addition, our state’s industries and economic interests were invested in the institution of slavery, producing shoes, clothing, and iron goods for Southern plantations. Resistance to enslavement and oppression took many forms including self-emancipation, revolt, and sustenance of alternate worldviews. In New Jersey and Philadelphia, there was a strong, organized anti-colonialist response to the American Colonization Society’s plan to ship free Black people back to Africa rather than improve living conditions and opportunities for this population in the United States.

The Reparations Task Force has sought to learn, engage, and confront this history which continues to impact us all in the 21st century. We have all inherited the power and equity imbalances central to enslavement and subsequent oppression and restrictions on people of African descent. No matter when we or our family arrived in New Jersey, this is our shared inheritance. Our active commitment to own up to New Jersey history in our churches and state will help us, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “raise up the foundations of many generations, and be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in” (Isaiah 58:12).

Respectfully submitted,

Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach, co-convener

Canon Annette Buchanan, co-convener

Canon Noreen Duncan, co-convener

The Rev. Beth Rauen Sciaino, member and notetaker