

**Diocese of New Jersey Reparations Commission
Report to the 239th Diocesan Convention**

Co-Chairs: Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach, Canon Annette Buchanan

Members: The Rt. Rev. Chip Stokes, Mr. Vernon Anthony, Ms. Alice Barnes-Vasser, The Rev. Greg Bezilla,* The Rev. Susanna Cates,* Mr. Willie Coleman, Canon Noreen Duncan,* The Rev. Joanne Epply-Schmidt, Mr. Jonathan Gloster, Ms. Clare Gutwein, Mr. Charles Hughes,* Dr. Patrick Milas, The Rev. Andy Moore,* The Rev. Ryan Paetzold, 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 Sciaino, The Rev. Sharon Sutton, The Rev. Megan Thomas, The Rev. Allen Wakabayashi,* The Rev. Jack Zamboni, The Rev. Edmund Zelley*
* indicates a member who rotated off during 2022

Consultant: The Rev. Charles Wynder; *Research Historian:* Dr. Jolyon Pruszinski

During the March 5, 2022, Diocesan Convention, the Reparations Commission was commissioned, and co-chairs and members were appointed by Bishop Stokes. This Commission came out of the diocesan Reparations Task Force that began in January 2021, following the passage of Resolution 2020-3 by Diocesan Convention in November 2020. Commission members participate in working groups focused on History and Research; Education, Engagement, and Advocacy; and Finance. At its April 23, 2022, meeting, the Reparations Commission engaged in a leadership exercise to identify its objectives and next steps.

The Commission continues to learn from reparations efforts in the U.S. and internationally. Throughout history most financial reparations for slavery have been paid to people who “owned” enslaved people of African descent in the U.S. or Caribbean, serving as financial “restitution” for their perceived loss of free and oppressed labor, rather than to the people who were enslaved. Together the Commission asks why?

The goal of the Reparations Commission is to:

- Develop, facilitate, and monitor a diocesan-wide process for Reparations, Reckoning and Racial Equity to repair the breach and harm created by the enslavement of African descendant peoples and communities in New Jersey.
- Address harm created by the actions and inactions of the Episcopal Church: its congregations, institutions, networks, congregants, lay and ordained leaders (both within the church and the public square).

The Reparations Commission of the Diocese of NJ utilizes this 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 a historical reckoning involving acknowledgement that an offense against humanity was committed and that the victims have not received justice that is due them.

According to the Prayer Book, “The mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (p. 855). The Diocese of NJ declares that “We have one purpose, to form people as disciples of Jesus Christ so they can carry out God’s mission of reconciliation in the world.” Therefore, the work of reparations is squarely at the heart of our Christian faith and call from God. The Reparations Commission is committed to the long-term nature of this gospel work.

At its May 24, 2022, meeting, the Commission welcomed guest speakers from the Presiding Officers’ Working Group on Truth-Telling, Reckoning, and Healing: the Rev. Canon John Kitagawa, Co-convener, and the Rev. Edwin Johnson, Member and Rector, St. Mark’s, Dorchester, MA. Two Journeying to Reparations Webinars were held in 2022, focusing on people who worked for reparations in their own lifetimes, Harriet Tubman (feast day: July 20) and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The March 29, 2022,

webinar featured a short film by Ms. Ivey Avery, a Harriet Tubman reenactor, and Dr. Christopher Fisher, Associate Professor of History at The College of New Jersey and parishioner of St. Luke's, Ewing. Dr. Fisher emphasized how Tubman sought her own reparative justice, even when reparations weren't forthcoming from the government. On April 5, 2022, the Tutu webinar featured historian the Very Rev. Dr. Michael Battle, Professor of Church & Society and Director of the Desmond Tutu Center, The General Theological Seminary; a musical selection from the Rev. Lester Mackenzie; and ANC affiliates, Ms. Rosita Johnson and Mr. Godfrey Sithole. Both webinars are available on the diocesan YouTube channel.

In Sept. 2022, the Reparations Commission hired a Research Historian, Dr. Jolyon Pruszinski, also a parishioner of Trinity, Princeton. In the first stage of his work, he has pulled together disparate research into enslavement in NJ and the NJ Anglican Church's participation in and support for enslavement during the colonial period, through Gradual Abolition and into the Civil War. This introductory information is now available in a blog - <https://dionj-racialjusticereview.blogspot.com>. The intention is to continue to share vignettes to further fill in the picture of a past that directly informs our shared present and future. Congregations are invited to share the research they have done or to become engaged in uncovering their own history, be it during the period of enslavement or later historical periods when the destructive impact of the NJ slave economy and slave codes continued in new forms of restrictions and systemic oppression experienced by people of African descent in our state and diocese. Resources for research and links to what other institutions are doing are also available on the blog.

On Oct. 16, 2022, Bishop Chip Stokes accepted the NJ Institute for Social Justice Community Builder Award on behalf of NJ Faith Allies for a Reparations Task Force: Say the Word, which is led by the Reparations Commission Co-Chairs Canon Annette Buchanan and Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach. NJ Faith Allies is a collaboration of interfaith and social justice partners working together with NJISJ to try to pass NJ legislation to establish a statewide task force to study reparations in NJ. This effort continues despite the challenge to encourage legislators who may understand the need for such a task force but view the word reparations as a political hot potato. Hence NJISJ's campaign to Say the Word: Reparations. Despite this, 15 municipalities throughout the state and two counties have passed resolutions encouraging state legislators to pass A938/S386 to establish a NJ Reparations Task Force.

Members of the Reparations Commission presented at the fall 2022 Convocation meetings throughout the diocese. A Journeying toward Reparations Webinar was held on Jan. 24, 2023, with Dr. Ron Daniels, Convenor of the National African Americans Reparations Commission (NAARC).

Currently, the Commission is inviting colonial-era congregations to partner and share stories related to enslavement that come out of the history of their congregations, parishioners, or clergy. All are invited to gather on March 25, 2023, at St. Peter's, Freehold for an outdoor Stations of Reparations liturgy to learn these stories, and lament past injustices and the harm that persists. Our hope is that we can be even more intentional and creative in offering opportunities for restorative justice at the communal, congregational, and diocesan levels. A liturgy at Trinity Cathedral is also planned for April 2023.

If you are committed to Anti-Racism and would like to join the Reparations Commission, please contact the Co-Chairs. We invite you to check out and subscribe to the blog as a way of confronting NJ's history and working to repair our communities. Help advocate for a NJ Reparations Task Force. We are grateful for our retiring bishop's support and advocacy throughout NJ on this critical issue and we look forward to continuing this work with the support of our incoming bishop and the people of the Diocese of NJ.

Respectfully submitted,

Canon Barbie Okamoto Bach and Canon Annette Buchanan, Co-Chairs

The Rev. Beth Rauen Sciaino, Secretary