

REPARATIONS & RECONCILIATION

Continuing the conversation about racial justice.

Trinity Church Wall Street chose race as the topic of the 2016 Trinity Institute theological conference in part because we are a racially diverse congregation on Sunday mornings. Bonds of friendship across racial differences have created a good place to host conversations on race. We continue our dialogue by focusing on reparations, one of the most difficult conversations of all.

We begin by acknowledging that, although Trinity did not own slaves, prominent members were slave owners, and the first church building was built in part by slaves. Trinity made the controversial decision to minister to enslaved individuals pastorally and some of our members founded the New York Manumission Society. As an institution, however, we didn't do the necessary work of advocacy to abolish slavery. Worse, along with all other white Americans, we benefited from an economic system that was built on the backs of enslaved people of color. We have work to do now and in the future to help heal that brokenness. Reparations are a compelling way to do that.

The discussion of reparations begins when we accept, without making excuses, the damage done by centuries of enslavement and discrimination. We are all still feeling the effects today with violence and division, prisons full of young men of color, police shootings, and poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Faithful conversation about reparations begins when we understand that these realities harm us all, no matter our race. In this way, the challenge of reparations is to live into Paul's prayer, "That we all may be one."

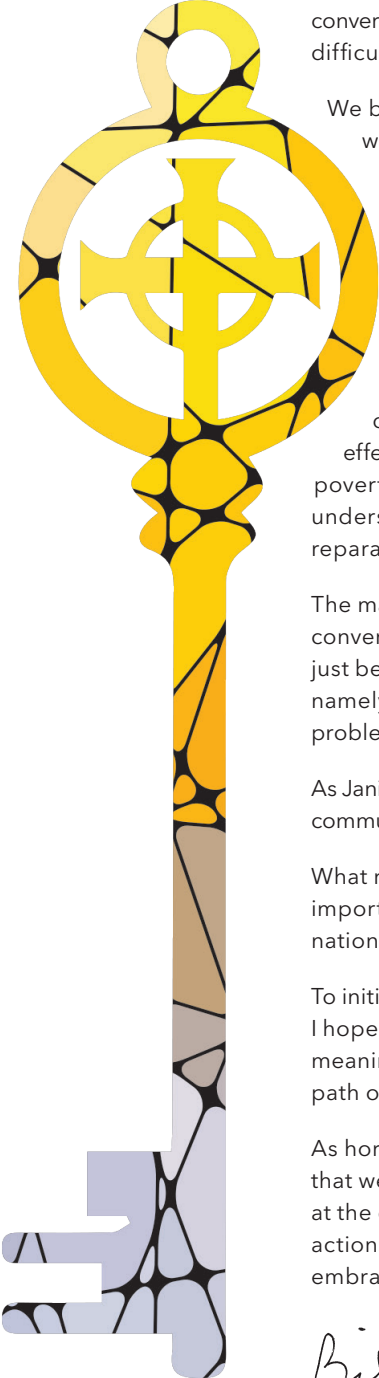
The manner in which our country and our church repair this damage is an ongoing, difficult conversation. Many of us feel uncomfortable or simply want to move on, asking, "Why can't we just be reconciled?" But we can't be reconciled without repairing the deep, historical divisions, namely by recognizing that slavery was a national policy to ensure access to free labor. The problem was, and still is, a national problem. The solution will be national in scope and purpose.

As Janine Tinsley-Roe reminds us in her article, reparations are also required for the Native American community in our nation. In this context, she points out, the questions are complicated and urgent.

What reparations would look like in practice is another difficult discussion, but I believe it is important that we have it. Trinity is exploring what our response might be as a parish and in a national context. We hope to do this with partners. Perhaps you'll join us.

To initiate the next step in our common life, we have brought a few passionate, thoughtful, and, I hope, controversial voices together in this magazine to encourage others to consider the meaning and importance of reparations. We hope these efforts will move us further along the path of honesty, hope, and reconciliation.

As horrible as it is to acknowledge, we know that Jesus lived with slavery. And we recognize that we live with the horrific effects of a racialized national economic policy of free labor at the expense of our entire nation. So be bold. Join us in these difficult conversations (and actions) as we move toward a national culture that is healed of the wounds caused by our embrace of slavery and genocide.



Bill Lupfer

The Rev. Dr. William Lupfer
Rector, Trinity Church Wall Street



WALK ON BY

Episcopalians must stop on the road to make amends.

By Stephanie Spellers

I write these words only days after two black men were killed by police officers in two American cities, on back-to-back days. I write in the shadow of St. Paul and Staten Island, of Baton Rouge and Baltimore, of Charleston and Cleveland. I write with keen awareness of the reason so many throats have grown hoarse crying out, “Black Lives Matter”: because in America today, the bulk of the evidence would suggest otherwise.

But I also write on the Monday after Christians around the world meditated on the story of the Good Samaritan. This familiar parable holds essential wisdom about the way toward healing and reconciliation, a way that must include reparations.

On Jericho Road

Come with me to the Jericho Road, where a man has been brutally attacked and left for dead. Two faithful men—a priest and then a Levite—draw close enough to encounter the moaning and the stench. Both walk on by.

The Samaritan does not. Among Jews the Samaritan is an outsider, so he may know something about a life that doesn’t matter the way all lives should matter. This man of considerable means sweeps up his broken neighbor and takes him to an inn. Then he stays to ensure the stranger makes it through the night, leaves funds to secure his care for the long haul, and promises to return. In other words, the Samaritan makes a lasting commitment of money and heart to repair a deeply broken situation he did not directly cause.

This is what mercy looks like. This is the true meaning of neighbor. This is the repair that makes genuine reconciliation possible.

We today have our own Jericho Road (call it America) where travelers (call them people of color) are regularly, brutally attacked and wounded emotionally and physically (call this centuries of systemic, structural racism). Those who have not been the targets of similar damage can now place their bodies and resources on the line to ensure repair. More than that, we can muster institutional will and ask, “What systemic interventions would repair damage wrought by structures built so the dominant group might flourish at the expense of others?”

Episcopalians and Privilege

The question is especially urgent for Episcopalians, because there may be no Christian community that has benefited more from structural racism. One might say the system was built for us.

For centuries, we were the church of the slaveholders and governors, the owning class and managing class. Alas, the privilege we accrued then remains now; according to the Pew Research Center’s 2014 survey, we are the most educated group of Christians in America: 56 percent of Episcopalians have finished college or graduate study, compared to only about a quarter of all Americans.

Meanwhile, 35 percent of Episcopalians make more than \$100,000 a year—the highest proportion of privileged people of any Christian denomination.

If any group has gained from the tragic condition of the Jericho Road, we have.

General Convention has issued apologies for the atrocities visited on communities of color and called congregations and dioceses to investigate how we were complicit in and benefited from such systems. But the Samaritan invites us to take the next step, to commit resources and heart to the ministry of reparations. It’s the same wisdom anyone in a 12-step recovery program would share: Early on you acknowledge what you’ve done wrong. Later, you say you’re sorry. The day finally comes when you make direct amends. Only then can you be truly reconciled with God and your neighbor.

By reparations, I do not mean writing a check to individual people of color or even to an organization led by

For centuries, we were the church of the slaveholders and governors, the owning class and managing class.

people of color. Go to the root of the word, and you find “repair.” We can join partners in discerning the investment needed to heal wounds and dismantle structures specifically built to benefit white people and institutions through the control, attack, and elimination of black, brown, and Native bodies, minds, and souls.

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Reparations is not an abstract concept. It is both pragmatic and eminently sensible:

- Churches could host, fund, staff, and/or lobby for quality pre-kindergarten education and intervention among the most vulnerable children of color. Such efforts have consistently been shown to reduce teen pregnancy and interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.
- We could lobby and organize to address racial profiling and sentencing policies that fill the criminal justice system with black, brown, and Native bodies.
- We could organize or join a network of comprehensive ministries that restore ex-offenders to mental and spiritual health, and prepare them

to participate meaningfully in church and society. Businesses and institutions we influence could offer a grace-filled, preferential option for ex-offenders, including extra training and mentoring, and organizational preparation for radical welcome.

- Perhaps most importantly, we could become humble, repentant partners with groups committed to restoration and repair. Rather than launch new efforts, we can walk alongside churches and organizations (including Episcopal institutions) rooted in the very communities with whom we long to be reconciled.

Interventions like these would take time and cost money. They would be worth it. Because the question isn't simply what individual white people or Episcopalians have done to harm people of color. It is whether, as a church, we see the connection between our church's prosperity and the millions of broken bodies left on the side of the Jericho Road. It is whether we feel moved to mercy, or just keep walking.

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers is the Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Evangelism and Reconciliation.

She is the author of *Radical Welcome* and *The Episcopal Way*.

A CRY FOR REPARATIONS

When will Native Americans have justice?

By Janine Tinsley-Roe



To a Native American, reparations can mean hope—hope that perhaps the Creator/God lives in the heart of the Conqueror. The hope that good can prevail over evil, that our lives and the lives of all of our people will not have been lost for nothing.

The Christian Church today speaks of injustices, but only rarely of the genocide of the Native American. Where is our church's conscience and heart, Great Spirit? I do not believe we should continue to speak about reconciliation when there is no prospect of action to repair the damage.

Native Americans have the highest poverty rate and one of the lowest graduation rates of any racial group. Throughout history, the oppressors have kept us busy deciphering their language in treaty obligations, legislative mandates, government policies, and church polity while we are trying to stand up against injustice, distracting us from demanding real change. The Church was silent and often complicit as we were eliminated from power. I am challenging the infrastructure that gives us no permanent place to oversee and control our economic, environmental, and social sustenance. Only when that changes will we feel whole again.

After more than five hundred years of extermination, stolen land, and discrimination, it is time for the government and churches to do more to serve Native Americans.

First, we must be given more educational and leadership opportunities. The Episcopal Church can facilitate this by providing scholarships to Native American students. There are not enough Native youth attending schools that prepare them for college. We need more opportunities for educated adults and elders to work as teachers and professors. These experiences will encourage them to strive for leadership positions in the government and the church. And we need indigenous institutions, such as colleges and Native studies programs, to tell our story and represent our lives and the issues that affect us.

We have an important place in the history of this country and are proud of our contributions to the faith and our brotherhood with all Christians. The church can advocate for legislation and initiatives that help us in our home states and territories. Where Natives are gathered, the church can be in the midst of us with financial support for initiatives such as a convention for its Native members, protection of sacred sites and burial grounds, and more Native congregations.

I pray that initiatives like these will repair our status so that "we, the people" who suffered the first injustices will be compensated by honoring our roles and work. We live and die under the hope that one day we will receive fairness for the damages and losses we suffer living under oppression, in poverty, and treated with disrespect. I for one am tired of this life. I for one, with my family, who identify as Native, am tired of living our dream in white men's prisons. I am writing the same story that so many of our leaders have written and spoken before.

The United States is our home, our rightful birth place. We did not give it away; it was taken. Give us something that we can take to our children with pride. Let us have a permanent voice in the systems of power, an equal voice. In the Creator's name, we continue to pray.

Janine Tinsley-Roe, Shinnecock, is the great-granddaughter of the Rev. Paul Cuffee, who is honored in the Episcopal Church's liturgical calendar.

She is the former Native American Missioner for The Episcopal Church.



A BIBLICAL VIEW OF REPARATIONS

In her writing and interviews, the pastor and theologian Jennifer Harvey has pointed out that Zacchaeus's pathway to discipleship was to give back what he owed. Likewise are we called to acknowledge and repay the debt we owe for the ways we benefit from past injustices.

A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

- Luke 19:1–10, NRSV



GHOSTS ALONG THE HIGHWAY

Acknowledging the lives history has erased.

By Megan Castellan



As a Southerner, as a Christian, I am acquainted with ghosts.

Ghosts weigh down the air. The spirits of stories my grandparents told float through the air like so much late-summer humidity. They are a fact where I grew up. Like matte silver plantation markers on the street corners. Like the glistening stretch of the Chesapeake Bay beyond the bridge-tunnel. Like the scrubby pine trees reaching up along the highway.

My maternal grandparents were born, raised, lived, and died in Richmond, Virginia, and their parents before them, and their parents before them, too. And so the ghosts of those people floated around us as my grandfather drove around downtown when I was

The act of reparations is prophetic.

small, pointing out the window. “See that house on the hill? That’s where the Confederate hospital was. See those train tracks? The Yankee fire burned so hot the tracks melted.” Didn’t matter that the war had ended more than a century before. We drove on the streets traced in the woods by the Powhatan, then carved out by the English. We lived in houses built on towns established by the colonists. We honored our ghosts in my family.

Or I thought we did.

A few summers ago, I went back to Richmond on vacation and wandered along the newly created Slavery Memorial Trail. It winds through downtown, along the James River, in the oldest part of the city. It hits up against the former signs of Virginian pride with its blunt assertions. The Virginia Park sign, across from Belle Isle, waxes eloquently about how Jefferson and Madison designed a marvelous system

of canals to make the James accessible to trading ships—these wise men saved the commonwealth in a time of peril! The Slavery Memorial sign, sitting alongside it in a matter-of-fact brown, points out that these canals were dug by hundreds of slaves, unpaid and uncared for, many of whom died in the midst of their labor. The commonwealth, at its founding, rested on neither common wealth nor common weal.

At the end of the trail sits a field. It’s hidden behind the I-95 overpass, near the local university, unassuming, green, and silent, save for the rushing of traffic. The field holds a cemetery used by the enslaved community of Richmond from the founding of the colony through the Civil War. It would be a mistake, however, to think it was gradually erased by forgetfulness or the benign neglect of time. It was destroyed when the white architects of the interstate highway system needed cheap material to build the overpass and ripped up the headstones for that purpose. You can still see the sideways grave markers embedded in the bridge.

Seeing Naboth

These were ghosts I’d never recognized—people whose lives held up the world I inhabited, the streets I traveled. And yet they now lay unnoticed, unremarked upon, beneath a swath of uncut grass or a former parking lot. The people whose toil, sweat, tears, and devotion had built the world my ancestors inherited and profited from had been erased, paved over, so my ancestors could have even more comfort. Human lives were used up and scrubbed out so that my family could drive on a highway.

The Scriptures tell us a story about Naboth, who stubbornly refuses to sell the vineyard that is his ancestral

inheritance to King Ahab; the king wants it to expand his vegetable garden. Naboth isn’t holding on to it because it’s worth a lot of money, but because it’s his inheritance, plain and simple. There his family is buried, there his roots are, there his identity is found. The king, deciding to effectively erase Naboth, has him killed on trumped-up charges and seizes the land on false premises. It is like Naboth and his family have never been. And yet, in comes Elijah, who confronts the king with this injustice, because while Naboth might have been erased in the sight of humans, humans cannot be erased from the sight of God.

It is the job of the prophetic church, in this day and age, to do this confronting. To remind the kings of the world from whence their riches come. To restore the desecrated ancestral fields. To bring the forgotten dead into common memory and remind us that we are surrounded by these ghosts. The act of reparations, then, is prophetic, in the sense that we formally acknowledge the material debt we owe to those erased. It is the king ceding his vegetable garden back to Naboth’s descendants.

To this day, the cloud of witnesses that presses so closely stands largely unnamed and unrecognized, yet we—in the predominately white church—profit from their labor in ways large and small. We process through the buildings they built, we kneel in their pews. We stand atop their graves, whether or not we realize it. It is past time to heed the call of Elijah, to name these ghosts and to give them humble and hearty thanks for what we have received.

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The definition of reparations from the Diocese of New York's reparations committee



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 acknowledgment that an offense against humanity was committed and that the victims have not received justice."*

*Bernice Powell Jackson, Executive Minister for Justice Ministry, The United Church of Christ

CHOOSING A NEW WAY

Jesus calls us to break the cycle of injustice.

By Winnie Varghese



René Girard, the philosopher of anthropology, claims that human beings and the societies we create behave in patterns of imitation that he calls “mimesis.” In this understanding of human behavior, we mimic one another and reproduce current conditions, and in doing so lock ourselves into destructive patterns. The release from these cycles involves choosing to act differently. We can choose forgiveness over vengeance. We can choose repentance over denial. We can choose restoration over retaliation.

That is a gross simplification of a groundbreaking theory, but it may be just enough to help us recognize the

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radical social implications of the words “reparation” and “reconciliation.”

As Christians, we believe reconciliation is an aspect or quality of the reign of God, which is a truth evident in creation and resurrection. That truth is rarely, if ever, manifest in the world as it is. We break relationships. We walk away. We scapegoat entire communities. We create defenses for our fears by generating prejudices against groups of people. We create explanations for inequity. We find ourselves imitating the most powerful among us, so that we and those we love will survive.

Our faith calls us to radically disrupt this way of being. Jesus’ victory over death was through death. He was ultimately vulnerable, and through that vulnerability he was subjected to the full force of the power of the state. By “the state” I mean the Roman Empire, or, in our time, the police or security state, the U.S. government, the things too big to defy, the institutions that are both the safeguards of our security and comfort and the vehicles through which injustice is reinforced. The state is also the tool with which reparations can be accomplished. The state is the party responsible for the great inequities that affect the lives of many people. The state supported slavery

and systematically stole the wealth and took the lives of untold numbers of black and brown people. The responsibility to do work on our collective behalf must ultimately rest with the state.

The State & The Church

Reconciliation on our plane of living requires us to create the conditions through which a glimpse of reconciliation may be seen or felt. As followers of Jesus, this is one of our most profound desires, to experience the love of God for creation in reconciliation. This requires the repair of damage done.

In issues of the scale that reparations addresses, there is both a civic and religious component for American Christians, and I think an interesting

tension between the two. Reparation is the path toward Christian hope but also hope for the promise of our United States.

Reparations includes asking for forgiveness. You might have seen in this election cycle how even the possibility of admitting an error as a nation is held up as a sign of weakness. No candidate can risk saying it. It seems we cannot say slavery, genocide, manifest destiny, nuclear warfare, or internment were wrong and caused unnecessary harm. Yet we cannot begin the work toward reconciliation without repentance and a turning around of how we live our common life. The only way to break the destructive cycle we find ourselves in is to recognize the sins of our past and then choose differently.

As Christians, we have rich resources in our tradition to help us as we move toward repair. There will not be a simple way forward, but as we know from our personal lives, the fallout from a simple choice, defended over time, can take a lifetime to begin to understand, much less repair. As a people we have the same responsibility, and as Christians, maybe even a greater share because of the great hope we have in Christ, the reconciler of all things.

The Rev. Winnie Varghese is Director of Justice and Reconciliation for Trinity Church Wall Street, and a member of Trinity’s reparations committee.

Won’t reparations divide us? Not any more than we are already divided. The wealth gap merely puts a number on something we feel but cannot say—that American prosperity was ill-gotten and selective in its distribution. What is needed is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts.

— Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* 2014

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

"THE CASE FOR REPARATIONS"

by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*, June 2014.

EPISCOPALIANS AND RACE:

Civil War to Civil Rights

by Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr.

THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK EXAMINES SLAVERY:

Talking About Reparations, Repair, and Reconciliation

Video produced by the Reparations Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, exploring the Church's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Available on YouTube.

DEAR WHITE CHRISTIANS:

For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation

by Jennifer Harvey

RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS:

Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America

by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

THE NEW JIM CROW:

Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

by Michelle Alexander

JUST MERCY:

A Story of Justice and Redemption

by Bryan Stevenson

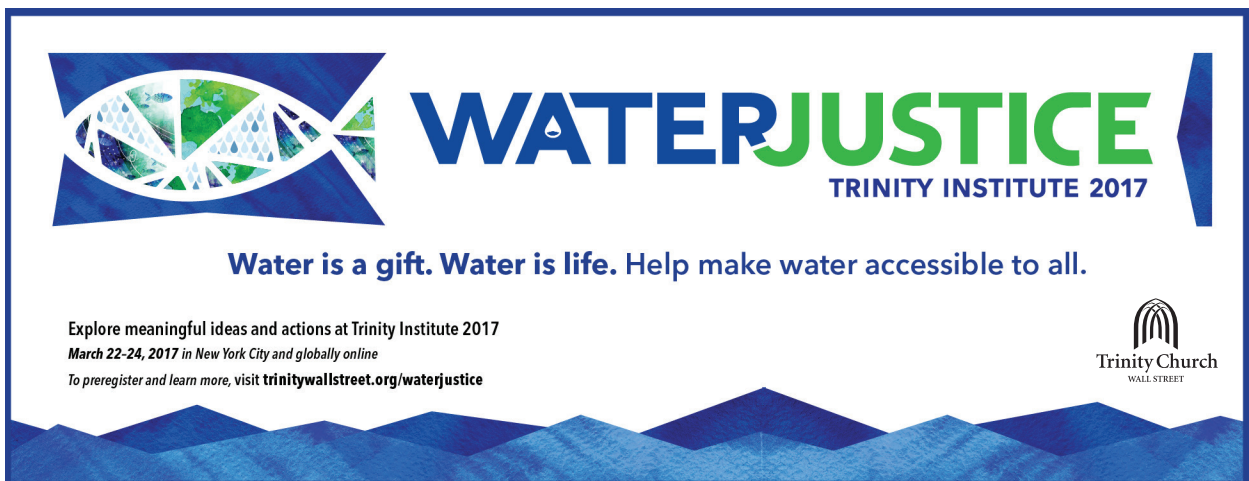
BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME

by Ta-Nehisi Coates

AMERICANAH

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

For more videos and stories about racial justice and other topics
visit trinitywallstreet.org.



The banner features a blue background with a white fish-shaped graphic on the left containing a globe and water droplets. The text "WATERJUSTICE" is in large blue and green letters, with "TRINITY INSTITUTE 2017" below it. The slogan "Water is a gift. Water is life. Help make water accessible to all." is centered. At the bottom, there is a blue mountain range graphic. On the right, the Trinity Church Wall Street logo is visible.

WATERJUSTICE
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