



The
Episcopal Diocese
of New York

**Transcript of the October 27th Online Rollout Meeting
for the
2021 Convention of the Diocese of New York**

The Rt. Rev. Mary Glasspool:

Good evening. I'm Mary Glasspool, Bishop Assistant in the Episcopal Diocese of New York, speaking to you from Donegan Hall, here at the diocesan center. Along with our Diocesan Bishop, Andy Dietsche, and our Bishop Suffragan, Allen Shin, and all the good people of the Diocese of New York, I welcome you to this, the fourth of our roll-out meetings of the 245th Diocesan Convention. The theme of our convention is from the words of Jesus who said, "Your faith has made you whole." He said it to the tenth leper, who after finding himself healed, turned around and came back to Jesus to thank him. He also said it to a woman who braved the crowds and touched Jesus' cloak and was healed of her hemorrhaging. And if you were listening to the Gospel this past Sunday, he said it to blind Bartimaeus, "Go, your faith has made you whole." We're all in need of a little bit of healing. And as the church, we need to share the Good News of Christ's healing and reconciliation in the world.

There are many people to be thanked. I want to call out our Secretary of Convention, Matt Heyd; and the Senior Assistant Secretary, Sara Saavedra; Lucy Breidenthal who coordinates these roll-out meetings; and Jeannine Otis, who is also coordinating our liturgical pieces and our prayers and the liturgy for the November 13th part of our Diocesan Convention. The theme of this roll-out meeting is "Reparations," and we have plenty on order for you. So without further ado, I will turn it over to Sandra Montez, for our opening song, and then an opening prayer.

Sandra Montez:

(singing)

[What] God of all humanity, who calls to bring about healing and wholeness for the whole world, for women and men of all races and cultures and creeds: Help us to respond to a world that is groaning under the weight of injustice and broken relationships. Remind us that your preachings are a gift and independently strength from the same creative God. Strengthen us to resist the forces that encourage polarization and competition, rather than understanding and cooperation. We know that your reign is not built on injustice and oppression, new life not just on the transformation of hearts, new life not just reordered life. Teach us forgiveness, O God. Bring us reconciliation. Give us hope for the future. We pray in Jesus' love, Amen.

Larry Marshall:

"To my old master, Colonel P. H. Anderson. Big Spring, Tennessee, by Jordan Anderson. August 22nd, 1865.

I got your letter and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jordan, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost Marshal General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid

to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly, and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for 32 years, and Mandy 20 years. At \$25 a month for me and \$2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to \$11,680. Add to this the interests for the time our wages have been kept back and deduct what you paid for our clothing and three doctor's visits to me and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to.

Please send the money by Adams Express in care of V. Winters, Esquire, Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here, I draw my wages every Saturday night. But in Tennessee, there was never any payday for Negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely, there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the labor of his hire.

Bishop Mary Glasspool:

That was a pretty dramatic reading. Thank you, Larry Marshall, and thank you for that letter. As I said, there are many things that we're going to learn about tonight in a very brief period of time. So I'd like to call upon my friend and colleague Richard Witt, one of the two co-chairs along with Cynthia Copeland of the Reparations Committee. Richard.

The Rev. Richard Witt:

Thank you, Bishop. Good evening, everyone. Cynthia and I are honored to be a part of an amazing group of people who make up the Reparations Committee. Since our previous convention, the committee has continued to create avenues for the members of the diocese to explore reparations, our own role in the enslavement of African Americans, and the ongoing legacy of that enslavement. In a few moments, you will see some of those efforts. At this convention, we are bringing forth two resolutions, one, that offers four values for us to hold dear as we explore reparations, and two, the call for a racial audit. These resolutions arise as a part of our journey the diocese began years ago. It has been an emotional, provocative and important journey, one that has exposed many costs and also many opportunities.

To help you appreciate this journey, we will present several videos that hold up both the committee's efforts and some experiences of people from around the diocese. After the video presentations, we will hear from members of the committee, the Reverend Chuck Kramer's speaking to the first resolution. And in turn Carla Burns and Waddell Stillman, speaking to the second. Our process and these resolutions are steps that we are taking for the implementation of the Convention resolution two years ago calling for the creation of a fund of reparations. Thank you for your prayers and your presence.

[Speaker 6:]

A mandate was entrusted to the Reparations Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of New York at the 2019 Convention, the committee was asked to assist in making recommendations for designating a sustainable program and distribution of committed Episcopal Diocese of New York reparations funds, an outcome of our 15 years long, diocesan wide exploration and study of the role of the Diocese in the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its aftermath. In recent years, due to the disturbing violence and alarming changes in racial and ethnic power dynamics in many sectors of the United States, we look to each other; to our congregations, affiliated local grassroots organizations, schools, and nonprofits for guidance and collaboration in efforts to do justice work.

Projects and programmatic series forum discussions such as *Voices Heard: A Diocese Explores Pathways Towards Reparations*, is a follow up to me on my neck slavery's ghosts and was created based on the parishioners and other participants survey responses that indicated urgent requests for this vital information. Presenting content that is educational, accessible, historical and relevant, will help people experientially connects the history of enslavement, race, racism, discrimination, and the church, with current structures. Here are some examples of what more is needed, how we feel about the process and what we've learned so far.

Geoff Loftus:

Hi, I'm Geoff Loftus, from St. James the Less in Scarsdale. And I have been part of St. James's Racial Justice Task Force for the last, I guess, year-and-a-half. And after all the research that we've done into our parish history, into our local Westchester history of the Episcopal Church's history, all of this research vis-à-vis, slavery and black lives, and all the participation in diocesan seminars and conferences, the two things that I've learned that really hit me is that, as a white American, I have only got the faintest idea of what it must be like to be black and to have been oppressed and disrespected, and made to suffer for the completely arbitrary reason that my skin is a different color. It's-

Pam Heldman:

We had really never discussed racism as a parish on such a personal level before. The experience was incredible. Most moving was to hear from the young people. I remember a black high school girl who goes to a predominantly white school in the area, talking about how every day she struggled to fit in, or feel like a token. Unimaginable was hearing from our black parents on how they had to educate their boys differently with a different behavior code. How could this be happening? It was heartbreaking.

Geoff Loftus:

It's horrific, and it's sad. And of course, despite the fact that I don't really understand what that's like, I can't because I'm white, but I'm so horrified, I wish there could be an instant turnaround. And unfortunately, the second lesson I've learned is that there's nothing about this situation that can be instantly transformed. It's going to require long-term commitment. It's going to require courage. It requires a lot of one-on-one relationships, where you treat people better, and you think through what you're doing and what you're saying, to improve things. And those are the things, the takeaways that I've gotten from being part of this task force. And I'm very grateful for that awareness. And I plan to keep going. Thank you.

The Rev. Nigel Massey:

When I came to Saint-Esprit, I discovered that we owned a garage in Brooklyn. I also discovered that a vestry person called Élie Naud [Elias Neau] had founded the first school for slaves in the American colonies, and that these two stories have to be told together. The land in Brooklyn was bequeathed to us in 1731, and the testator was a man called Louis Lacombe. He made his fortune in Paramaribo in Suriname, he was rich enough to dispose of his Brooklyn farm for the benefit of the French poor in New York. John Gabriel Stedman left an eyewitness account of the conditions in the plantations illustrated by William Blake, it played a part in the abolitionist cause in England. The image here is the most famous and the most disturbing in the book. And it's a terrible indictment to anybody who's tempted to draw a veil over this dark part of our past. Here briefly as some of the things that we learned. Lacombe left little trace on history, we learned that his profession was banal. The evil of slavery was ubiquitous, and he simply blended into the ethos of the times.

Secondly, our history in Saint-Esprit is a history of persecution. Élie Naud was a white Frenchman, enslaved on the galleys of the Catholic French king, imprisoned in the Château d'If. And there was a common belief that Hugo's wouldn't have slaves because they'd suffered too much. But we know that that's not true. It doesn't seem that religious persecution necessarily makes you more likely to have sympathy with another persecuted people. Thirdly, you can't tell the stories of the saints without telling the stories of the sinners. We can't tell Élie Naud's story, without talking about slavery. It's tempting for some people to say, well, slavery was horrible. But let me tell you a lovely story about somebody who was against it in our own history, as if a bad man plus so good man cancel each other out. And if we think of reparations, in terms of this sort of double-entry bookkeeping, we'll miss the greatest lessons that the disgrace and the tragedy of slavery can teach us.

Élie Naud's school was supported by a grant from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. They owned the Coddington plantation in Barbados, and the profits from that plantation financed their missionary activities. The plantation slaves had the word "Society" branded on their backs with a hot iron. Sometimes the sinners and the saints look very alike. We exchanged that property in Brooklyn for a brownstone neighboring our church here in Manhattan. We've established a parish fund to support education and vocational grants, and a fund to welcome and resettle newly arrived refugees in New York, particularly francophones from the French speaking countries of West Africa, whose contemporary conflicts are rooted in slavery and impacted by Americans foreign policy, even today. In the end, these stories have really helped us to walk in the shoes of other people.

Naud and Lacombe have given us spiritual and material support from our history to champion the exile, to stand on the side of the oppressed. We've discovered that reparation is a common task of healing. And by telling more stories like this, we can learn to be more faithful witnesses to Christ in our own generation. Thank you.

The Rev. Brenda Husson:

Hello, I'm Brenda Husson, the rector at St. James' Church. This parish was founded back in 1810. Not right on the spot, but very much in this neighborhood. And when it was founded in 1810, slavery was legal and widely practiced in New York. So, we began some years ago to do some research to look into the parish archives and learn about the names and business interests of the men who are the incorporators of the parish, and its first real leadership here. Not surprisingly, they were deeply invested in enslavement, and their wealth derived often in large measure from unpaid labor. Next, we shared that research with the whole parish, and we made the decision to acknowledge, and also to lament this part of our history, and then to place a bronze plaque right out on Madison Avenue. Unlike the memorials that are all around the inside of the church, this one honors those who were enslaved and contributed involuntarily, to establishing St. James'.

It is, as you can see a very public witness. It begins with a verse from John's gospel, where Jesus says, "The truth will set you free." And then the plaque reads, "In solemn remembrance of the enslaved persons whose labor created the wealth that made possible the founding of St. James' Church, Hamilton Square, 1810." It finishes with the appropriate plea, "Christ have mercy." Together with the Reparations Committee of the Diocese, St. James' also hosted a performance of the powerful play, A New York Lamentation. In fact, it was that play that first made us begin to think about creating a plaque. While acknowledging the words and efforts of some Episcopal clergy who sought abolition, the play makes it painfully clear that most of the leaders in our diocese took part in perpetuating slavery and racism and justifying both. Here is much to lament, apologize, and repair.

Discovering this legacy has only called us deeper into discipleship and into efforts to help build the beloved community. Among many initiatives to that end, right now we have several groups, some in-

person, some on Zoom, who are engaged in the extraordinary curriculum offered by the Episcopal Church called Sacred Ground. It's a curriculum that calls us to grapple with all the complexity and all the difficulties of our American history, and also asks people to reflect on their own place in the story, whether in the past or right now. We've really only scratched the surface. And this work here at St. James' has only just begun, but it's the right work. I hope you'll join us.

[Speaker 6:]

You have heard, seen, and read the reflections, actions, commitments, and challenges that members from our church family have confronted, overcome, celebrated, or continue to struggle with the suppressed and shameful legacy. However, doing this work enables us to make a full faithful and informed accounting of our history, leading towards restorative justice, amends, repair, and perhaps driven by our four core values, though much later, it can be healed and reconciled.

The Rev. Chuck Kramer:

Good evening, everyone. At the 2019 Annual Convention of the Diocese of New York, the members of the Diocese Reparations Committee were tasked with making recommendations for a sustainable program to distribute its committed reparations fund. This is an outcome of our years-long diocese and wide exploration and study of the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its aftermath. The committee believes that no reparation can be made in the absence of some defining and guiding values or principles. The four primary values the committee has identified are truth, justice, integrity, and transformation. In order for there to be reparation, we must tell the truth, we must seek justice for all, we must pursue it with integrity, and we must be open to transformation, not only for ourselves individually, but for society, and particularly the church. The Reparations Committee recognizes that there are several ways to understand these values as individuals, as community, and in our relationship with God. That's why it's important to address them separately.

Truth. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." Living in Christ's truth means seeing the world both as it is and as Christ desires it. God's truth is universal. Individual truth comes from knowing oneself. And communal truth is when the community decides together what the truth will be for their communal life. In the context of slavery and its ongoing effects, truth requires us to study how this country and church were built on the backs of enslaved people, and to call it what it was. It means facing the brutality of enslavers and their campaign to dehumanize the enslaved. It means studying the post slavery era, recognizing and acknowledging that efforts to dehumanize the descendants of enslaved people continue to this day through multiple systemic practices and policies. For the church, it means recognizing our role in perpetuating discrimination, and looking at our current status as a predominantly white church still largely segregated and unequal.

Justice. Dr. Cornel West once said, "Justice is what love looks like in public." In the context of reparation, justice is more than simply penalizing those who do wrong or giving some form of payment to those who have been wronged. Justice is healing. Justice in God's beloved community is a condition in which every person feels wanted, at ease, and safe in their community. It's a condition in which every person feels that they belong without condition or reservation. It is restoring the dignity, the safety, the sense of belonging, the equality of opportunity that had once existed long before slavery polluted this land and the people sharing it. Justice as a guiding value for reparation, is never about revenge for harm done, but about changing the power dynamic, which currently puts whiteness at the peak of power. Justice is getting the right relationship in which all people see themselves and each other and treat themselves and each other as equal and equally beloved children of God.

Integrity. Whether we are talking about individuals, communities such as the church, or our relationship with God, integrity implies internal consistency. It implies wholeness and honesty. Integrity is a crucial value for reparation because it requires us to know who we are. It requires us to look deeply at ourselves, our words, our actions, and to ensure that they match. Integrity means not only speaking for the common good, and for truth and justice, but acting for them. This is especially true for the church which speaks of God's love, but in relationship to slavery, has too often failed to act out of that love. As we approach reparation, to have integrity means to hold on to the vision of God's beloved community as our greatest good, and to revise our words and actions as necessary to reach that community.

Transformation. A primary purpose of the church is transformation. We are called to grow into God's truth, into God's faith, hope and love. And the Church exists to facilitate that growth. In the context of reparation, we accept that true repair cannot happen until we are transformed as individuals and as community, especially as the church, and of course in relationship to God. We recognize that while changing laws and policies may be necessary, this alone will not repair the breach, the deep gash in the tapestry of God's vision for us. For that to happen, we must be changed. No society can be just equal and fair, unless it wants to be. And that will not be possible without such transformation. To that, this committee commits itself, and it is our hope that the Church will do so as well. Thank you.

Waddell Stillman:

Thank you, Chuck. Hello, I'm Waddell Stillman, a member of the Reparations Committee and a parishioner at St. James', Manhattan. I'm here to speak in support of the Reparations Committee recommendation to the diocese, that we undertake a racial audit here in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. I want to urge voters of the Diocesan Convention, to vote for this important resolution that will allow us to proceed with this important project. Each Sunday, we sit in the cocoons of our individual congregations to worship God. Most of us know little of the wonderful ethnic and cultural diversity that exists in our geographically widespread diocese. But it is important for us to know one another as New York Episcopalians, and fellow followers of Jesus, as we travel the road to becoming the beloved community the goal Jesus has set for us. Conducting this audit will help us on this journey.

In April of this year, the national Episcopal Church published a racial audit of the kind we're proposing our diocese undertake. The National Audit paints a fascinating picture of the Episcopal Church and in the United States, and its striving toward becoming Beloved Community. In addition to data, there are interviewed quotations, many are very compelling and deeply heartfelt. All are anonymous. These quotes describe experiences of steps forward and steps back, of awkwardness and of grace, of invitations sometimes issued, but not followed up by true inclusion. Unfortunately, our diocese, the Episcopal Diocese of New York, was left out of the National Audit. So when the family photo was taken, we were not present and don't appear in the picture of this important report. No, we were not snubbed or intentionally excluded. But in the choosing of a representative sample of all 109 diocese and the Episcopal Church, our diocese wasn't selected. Therefore, it is important that we conduct our own audit. Carla.

Carla Burns:

I'm Carla Burns from the Church of the Holy Innocents in Highland falls, and also a member of the Reparations Committee. This resolution, which will come before convention on November 11th, will commission a racial audit of our diocese to show us a portrait of ourselves as we are. The data would be our own facts and figures, the charts and graphs inescapably ours. The quotations would be the words of our own clergy and lay leaders. Those words would be reported anonymously, yes, but they would have been spoken by voices actually among us, about experiences we ourselves have been through,

about experiences of race and racism that we have helped to shape and that have shaped us. The pain noted would be our pain, and the progress, our progress.

Being New Yorkers, we've discovered a few things that we can improve upon from the National Audit just published. For example, rather than measure only the universe of respondents to the survey in New York, we would take the entire census of the Diocese as our baseline, comparing the diversity of our communities with that of our congregations. An audit is a serious undertaking, motivated by the values Reverend Chuck Kramer have just named. We are applying them to all our work; the values of truth, justice, integrity, and transformation. We believe that a racial audit of the Episcopal Diocese of New York is an invaluable opportunity to see ourselves as we are, and to better recognize the face of God in each other.

When the diocese undertakes a racial audit, we will have a baseline from which to chart our growth. We will speak truth about who we are at the outset of the work ahead, you will identify points of pain from which to diagnose and cure the sins of systemic racism that persists in our diocese. It will also guide the further work of the Reparations Committee, and other allied groups and individuals in our diocese, as we move through continuing cycles of lamentation, apology, and repair, and as we propose further actions and investment in reconciliation and healing. On behalf of the Reparations Committee, I ask you to please vote yes, to undertake a racial audit in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Thank you.

The Rev. Matt Heyd:

Good evening, we want to share what's next for our work together and convention. First, the bishop described at the top of the row in our meeting tonight, our theme, which is, Your Faith Has Made You Whole. And through everything we're doing this fall, the roll-out meetings, and our convention in November, we're following three values; keep safe, stay connected, and be accessible for the whole diocese. So here's what's next. We're having one more time together next week, November 3rd, at 5:00, for informational voting, we'll say more about that. The week of November 8th; Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, we're going to vote together on all the resolutions, including the budget, and the candidates. November 13th, we're going to have a hybrid convention, online and in-person. So next week, 5:00, we're going to do three things together to get ready to vote.

I'm really grateful that the Reverend Deacon Chris Colón is going to be our Inspector of Elections this year. He's going to lead us through how we're going to vote together before convention. Thanks to Sara Saavedra for making all the arrangements to make sure we can vote together with accessibility for everybody. Reverend Susan Fortunato, chair of the leadership development commission's going to help us think about and mix this up. So, the Reverend Ann Sawyer, who's chair of the Resolutions Committee is going to lead us through the resolutions with a special attention to those resolutions we have not talked about in these keynote presentations through the roll-out meetings. And then Susan Fortunato, who is chair of the Leadership Development Commission, is going to lead us through the candidates. And so we can get to know the folks we're voting on for different dioceses and offices.

And then the week of November 8th, we're going to vote together as we did last year, across four days, making sure everyone have access to voting. We'll vote on candidates, resolutions, and the 2022 budget. The only votes on Saturday November 13th will be any resolutions arising from the Bishop's convention address. Now, on November 13th, we're going to have a hybrid convention that allows us to both, be safe and stay connected to each other. The convention will include the bishops' addresses, Eucharist led by Jeannine Otis who's put together the liturgy for that day beautifully, recognition and voting on any resolutions from the Bishop's address. We'll also have time together as small groups. We're going to listen to each other and pray together for all we've been through over these last 18 months. This will be

the first time we gather together as a whole diocese at the Cathedral in several years since the pandemic began.

So, we're going to meet at the Cathedral in person. We're going to live stream, so that everyone everywhere can feel safe and stay connected. There's also the possibility of small regional group gatherings. In your registration that Sara has sent out, and they'll be able to register, whether it be at convention on November 13th, online or in-person. I'm grateful to everyone who has made these roll-out meetings possible over the last four weeks. Thanks especially to Lucy Breidenthal for leading production, and Bishop Glasspool for leading each of these meetings so well. And to our keynote presenters before next week, to hearing more about the things we're voting on, how we're going to vote, the resolutions, [inaudible 00:45:55], and the candidates led by Susan Fortunato. Bishop, thank you.

Bishop Mary Glasspool:

Thank you, Matt, and thanks to all who have worked so diligently and hard to put all this together. Every week, we offer a time of prayer. And we invite all those of you who have taken and really shared with us your precious time to view these roll-out meetings and engage with them, to put your prayer requests, petitions, intercessions, thanksgivings, concerns, hopes and fears for the future, in the chat room. And I invite you to do so now, as we'll share a few moments of silence, and then have a musical background, during which again, I invite your prayers. And when you read them in the chat room, it, for me at least, becomes a very moving experience of how at least our portion of the Diocese, those who are engaged in this particular roll-out, are thinking about things and reflecting on things and praying for things, on this particular occasion. Let us pray.

(singing)

Waddell Stillman:

We believe in God, creator of the world and of all people; and in Jesus Christ incarnate among us, who died and rose again; and in the Holy Spirit, present with us to guide strengthen and comfort. We believe; God, help our unbelief.

Carla Burns:

We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom, in the upholding of human dignity and community, in every expression of love, justice and reconciliation, in each act of self-giving on behalf of others in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us, that all may have enough in all responsible use of the Earth's resources. Glory to God on high; and on earth, peace.

The Rev. Chuck Kramer:

We confess our sin, individual and collective by silence or action, through the violation of human dignity based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith, through the misuse of power in personal, communal, national and international life, through the search for security through military and economic forces that threaten human existence, through the abuse of technology which endangers the earth, and all life upon it. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.

The Rev. Trevor Babb:

We commit ourselves individually, and as a community, to the way of Christ, to take up the cross, to seek abundant life for all humanity, to struggle for peace with justice and the freedom, to risk ourselves in faith, hope and love, praying that God's Kingdom may come. Thy kingdom come, on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

Bishop Mary Glasspool:

With deep gratitude in my heart, I offer a prayer and a blessing from William Sloane Coffin, the late pastor of Riverside Church. May God grant you the grace never to sell yourself short, grace to risk something big for something good, grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love. And the blessing of the God who creates us, redeems us and sustains us, be upon us and remain with us this night and forevermore. Amen.

(singing)