

THE FOUR VALUES OF REPARATIONS
Statement of the Reparations Committee
of the Episcopal Diocese of New York

At the 2019 annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, the members of the diocese's 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 diocesan-wide exploration and study of the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its aftermath.

We have determined that in order to appropriately make these recommendations, we first needed to establish a set of values by which we will work.

We take as our foundation Christ's command to love. The summary of the law Christ gives is to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. John, in his first epistle commends us to "love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Our presiding bishop has told us "If it is not about love, then it's not about God."

Building upon this foundation, we have identified four values necessary for the work of reparation. The following is a statement that explains the genesis of the Four Values as part of our process.

Reparation is the repairing of something that was once whole — or in the context of slavery and its descendants in the US, it is the creation of something that never was. It is the making a new relationship as it might look if it had never been broken. In this sense, reparation is the repairing of the Vision of God for Beloved Community, a community that exists to embody God's Love.

The Reparations Committee of the Diocese of New York believes that no Reparations can be made in the absence four defining and guiding values. Those values are Truth, Justice, Integrity, and Transformation.

That is, in order for there to be Reparation, we must tell the **truth**. In order for there to be real Reparation, we must seek **justice** for all. In order for there to be Reparation we must pursue it with **integrity**. And in order for Reparation to truly happen, we must be open to **transformation** not only for ourselves individually but for society collectively.

Much as our Presiding Bishop says, "If it's not about Love, it's not about God," so can we say, "If it's not about Truth, Justice, Integrity, and Transformation, then it's not Reparation."

But what do these values mean?

When the Reparations Committee reflected on their meaning, we recognized that there are several ways to understand them, as individuals, as the community, and in our relationship with God.

While it is important to recognize that these values are connected and interdependent, it is best to address each 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. It means examining critically one’s own life, one’s community, and God’s dream of Beloved Community with honesty and unflinching courage.

We begin with God’s truth. God’s truth is universal. It applies to every person, every land, every time in the world.

Individual truth comes from knowing oneself. It means seeing one’s own experience, thoughts, actions clearly and honestly. It recognizes that individuals will perceive things differently — what is true for one is not true for the other. My truth is not necessarily your truth.

Communal truth is broader. A community decides together what the truth is that they will live together. Traditions, laws, policies, informal practices and collective memory are part of communal truth.

In the context of slavery and its ongoing effects, truth requires us to study how this country (community) was 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.

Truth for the Church means studying and acknowledging that it, like the country, was founded and nurtured by enslavers and those who benefited from slavery. Truth requires acknowledging that this church, when given numerous opportunities to repent of and renounce the enslavement of fellow children of God, chose instead to embrace it more fully. It means recognizing our role in perpetuating discrimination and looking at our current status as a predominantly white church still largely segregated and unequal.

Truth as a value for Reparation means speaking that truth. We speak it to ourselves, to our community, and to God in the form of confession, spiritual examination and commitment to healing the injury. We speak the truth to those in power as part of that healing.

God’s Truth is that God created us, that God loves each of us as precious children, and that we are called to love each other with that same singleness of heart. Without that, there can be no real reparation. With God’s truth, we are set free and it is through that truth, difficult as it may be, that the path forward lies.

JUSTICE:

“Let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”
(Amos 5:24)

“Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” (Cornel West)

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 is a condition in which every person feels that they belong — without condition or reservation. Justice leads to an experience of the world that is trauma free.

Justice is not charity but a freeing of all God’s children from the burden of oppression, recognizing that oppression such as racism corrupts all of the community even as it inflicts particular harm on its individual victims.

Justice is about restoring what has been taken away from the victims of injustice (in this case racism). 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 to 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.

Justice in the context of Reparation is as much about conversion — individual and communal — as it is about actions. This never-ending task is essential to living into our baptismal covenant. Because of its enormity, we may be reluctant to confront injustice and work for God’s justice. But justice requires that we let go of our hesitancy and begin (or continue) the work.

INTEGRITY

“I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there.” (1 Chronicles 29:17)

“In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” (Titus 2:8, NIV)

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. It implies a sense of “What you see is what you get.”

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, and our actions and ensure that they match.

In the context of Reparation, integrity means being consistent with the Gospel message of God’s abiding love for all of creation, especially for each of God’s Children. Integrity means, therefore, not only speaking for the common good, for truth, for justice, but acting for it. This is especially true for the Church which speaks of God’s love but in relationship to slavery failed to act out of that love.

Integrity does not mean always being right and clinging to our positions unbendingly — it means consistency in our honesty, and when we discover we have gone astray or been operating from incomplete or wrong information, to realign our words and actions. It may mean recognizing one’s own fault, apologizing, and committing to repair the harm and ensure that the fault does not happen again.

Integrity is not self-destructive. It is self-instructive. It is a corrective to stubbornness or being held captive by past teaching or tradition. It is the act of living into our better angels.

As we approach Reparation, to have integrity means to hold on to the vision of God’s Beloved Community as our greater good, and to revise our words and actions as necessary to reach that community.

TRANSFORMATION:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Perhaps the 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. We walk in faith together knowing that the vision of the Beloved Community is not yet realized — and that the Church has often stood in the way of its realization — but that we and those with whom we walk aspire to it. We offer our lives to be transformed into the lives God wants for us.

In the context of Reparation, we accept that true Repair cannot happen until we are transformed as individuals, as community — especially the Church — and 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.

The work of reparation is necessarily an ongoing, spiritual pursuit, and we appreciate that we may not yet see where we need to be going. As St. Paul says, we see in a glass dimly and know only partly. We only see imperfectly what the Beloved Community can be like.

As such, we commit ourselves to constant self-examination, to the humility of recognizing when our vision is too small and our actions inconsistent. We commit to growing, to changing, to adapting. No society can be just, equal, and fair unless it wants to be — and that will not be possible without a transformation, a conversion, in the hearts not only of individuals, but of our entire society.

Therefore, O God, by acknowledging these four values, we dedicate ourselves to renouncing indifference, seeing one another, and working together. Through stewardship of this fund, we commit ourselves to taking actions to do the hard and painful work guided by faith, love, and hope.

Assist us O God in delivering a better world re-built, and re-imagined. And through our transformation, let truth, justice, and integrity reign. Help us to we hold ourselves, the whole church and all of society accountable for the enduring legacy of the atrocities of the Transatlantic slave trade infecting generations of people.