

- o Resolved, that this 226th Convention of the Diocese of Rhode Island affirms the resolutions adopted by the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the call of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry for the church to embrace the serious work of racial reconciliation, and be it further
- o Resolved, that this Convention affirms our commitment to the work of racial reconciliation and supports our Center for Reconciliation that, in partnership with the congregations of this Diocese, initiates and supports efforts that lead to social justice, racial equality, and racial reconciliation, and be it further
- o Resolved, that this Convention encourages every parish and mission of the Diocese to adopt and implement a plan for how their congregation will engage in some way in the process of racial reconciliation and designate a contact person or persons to receive and share communications from the Center for Reconciliation, and be it further
- o Resolved, that this Convention encourages congregations to adopt the third Sunday of Epiphany or another appropriate time to serve as a liturgical and educational focus of this work.

EXPLANATION

In 2006, the 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church urged every Diocese to collect and document detailed information in its community on the complicity of The Episcopal Church in the institution of slavery and in the subsequent history of segregation and discrimination and the economic benefits The Episcopal Church derived from the institution of slavery. Subsequent resolutions in 2009 and 2012 reiterated and expanded the call for dioceses to engage in work of racial reconciliation.

In 2014 the Diocese of Rhode Island responded to that call by encouraging the Cathedral Chapter to develop and implement a plan by which the Cathedral can be dedicated to racial equity, equality, and justice in the following ways:

- o As a sacred space for transformative worship that embodies the mission of reconciliation;
- o As a Center for Reconciliation that will serve as a home for academic and public engagement with the history of the slavery and racism in Rhode Island and that will equip individuals and groups to become agents of reconciliation;
- o As a museum and performance space that provides opportunities for people to explore the intersection of race, faith, especially as practiced by the Episcopal Church in Rhode Island, the historical institution of slavery.

Since that time, the Center for Reconciliation was formed and began its work offering initial programs and developing plans for other aspects of the work identified above. Recently the Cathedral Chapter authorized the initial renovations which will enable the Center for Reconciliation to have space dedicated to its work.

In 2015 the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church encouraged all Episcopal congregations to establish relationship-based, social-justice ministries, partner with local expert organizations that use relationships to structure their transformative work, and share their experiences with the broader Church. It affirmed "that the call to pray and act for racial reconciliation is integral to our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to our living into the demands of our Baptismal Covenant." And it charged the Presiding Bishop, the President and Vice President of the House of Deputies "to lead, direct, and be present to assure and account for the Church's work of racial justice and reconciliation."

The Baptismal Covenant in our Book of Common Prayer calls us to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself...[and to] strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." Reconciliation lies at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is reflected in the mission of the church which is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." (BCP, p. 855)

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the Coordinating Committee of The Center for Reconciliation by:

Signed Rev. David A. Ames, Print REV. DAVID AMES, Email DAAMES3@VERIZON.NET

Signed Rev. Dorothy L. Brightman, Print REV. DOROTHY L. BRIGHTMAN, Email DOBRIGHTMAN@AOL.COM

Signed W. David Dobbins, Print W. DAVID DOBBINS, Email THE REV DOBBINS@GMAIL.COM

Report of the Center for Reconciliation

November 2016

History: How did we get here?

In 2006 and in successive years, General Convention adopted a series of resolutions that acknowledged the Episcopal Church's history of participation in and support of the slave trade and the deep and lasting injury which the institution of slavery and its aftermath have inflicted on society and the Church. The Convention asked each Episcopal diocese to examine its history and involvement in slavery and the slave trade, and the legacy of that involvement. The Center for Reconciliation is the response of the Diocese of Rhode Island to that request.

The decision taken in 2012 to suspend services and close St. John's Cathedral was the impetus for a vision of creating a place and programs that would enable our church and the citizens of Rhode Island to look at our unique place in the history of slavery and the slave trade. While we usually think of slavery as a Southern institution, Rhode Island was, of all the Northern states, the most deeply involved both in the slave trade and in supporting the institution of slavery. About 60% of all slaves brought to the Americas were transported on ships that were launched from Providence, Bristol and Newport. And most of our state's economy was built on revenues generated by slavery and the slave trade, and later by profiting from Southern slavery in the processing of cotton textiles and the production of "Negro cloth" for sale to Southern slave owners. Yet many Rhode Islanders remain unaware of our colonial history of slavery and slave trading and our dependence on Southern slavery from the Revolution to the Civil War. And there are few places in the state where people can encounter and explore this history.

Why should our diocese take on that task?

While Baptists, Jews, Quakers and Congregationalists were, of course, involved in the slave trade and its auxiliary businesses, the reality is that many, if not most, of the leading businessmen engaged in the slave businesses were Anglicans who, after the Revolution, were known as Episcopalians. The shipping industry, rum distilleries, dairy farms, banks, insurance companies, textile mills and more were owned by Anglicans and the wealth they acquired built our churches, schools and communities. While some spoke out against slavery, many others, including our clergy, owned slaves.

While many would prefer to ignore this history, we have a unique opportunity to model a different response—we can create an environment in which we can learn to confront this history, own it, learn from it and to begin the long and difficult task of healing and reconciliation. While slavery occurred in the past, its legacies are painfully present today. Many of the negative attitudes and assumptions about Blacks that were used to justify slavery continue to influence impressions about people of color today. And it is the remaining impact of racism, discrimination and separation that we are called to address.

We do not have many African Americans in the Episcopal Church so our dialogue will, of necessity, need to reach beyond our own members to our fellow Rhode Islanders as we

learn to hear each other's stories. We believe that the repurposed St. John's Cathedral can become a multifunctional facility that provides a broad range of learning experiences—lectures, training events, films/videos, performances, art exhibits etc.—that can contribute to the understanding of slavery and its legacy to contemporary society. It can be a home to worshipping communities and a place where we, as the Episcopal Church, can gather for special services and events and where we can invite the community to gather in response to current events.

What is our vision?

Our vision, then, is to provide a “safe space” wherein those difficult conversations about slavery and its legacy can occur so that our society can begin a transformative healing process. We envision partnering with organizations, both faith-based and secular. We want to open multiple doors to invite people into conversations with each other. For one person, it might be a musical performance, for another person it might be a lecture or a theatrical presentation while someone else might visit a museum or art exhibit or attend a training program that prepares them to take action in the community or participate in a worship service.

The goal is to invite people into dialogue, using wide range of “entry points” – performances, exhibits, films, study groups, lectures and more. Cathedrals have traditionally been sites that intersect the sacred and the secular—a venue for excellence in liturgy and the performing and visual arts and a place to explore current events. Cathedrals have also provided “sanctuary” from the world - a safe space for healing and restoration. The vision is for our Cathedral to become that place for us, as a diocese, as well as for the state and even people who will come to visit from elsewhere.

How will our congregations be involved?

We know that there are some churches and diocesan groups that have already been working with us or doing this work on their own, and we want to issue an open invitation to others who want to become involved in this ministry. We want our churches and their members to know about the events we host or co-sponsor so those who want to be involved can do so. And we want to support our churches—so we will have resources and programs that can come to you as well as events you can attend around the state. For example, we have a book study guide on *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* that can be used for Lent; we are working on a traveling exhibit that will give you a glimpse of the kind of displays that might be in the museum. RISD is doing Gallery Nights with us, exhibiting some of their archival works and a professor there wants to start film nights in the Cathedral library when we get that renovated.

We have included a list of the programs we've done in the last year (below) and we hope each church will designate at least one person to receive information about upcoming events and resources. Each congregation is different, and each of you will need to decide what works for you. If you want help developing a plan for your church, members of the CFR team are willing to help you discern which events or resources might be best suited for your situation. However you choose to engage in this work, we invite and welcome individuals, groups and congregations to join in the work of reconciliation.

Why is it important for us, as a church, to do this work?

The *Book of Common Prayer* says in the catechism: “The mission of the church is to restore all people to God and each other in Christ.” And Paul said to the church in Corinth:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...

The Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, talks about three priorities of the Episcopal Church and how each of them relates to reconciliation:

- Evangelism is reconciling people to God in Christ
- Racial reconciliation is reconciling ourselves and others
- Environment is reconciling ourselves with the creation

We believe that in this time, and in this place, we are called to take up the ministry of reconciliation. The work of the Center for Reconciliation is one way we see that we, as the Episcopal Church in RI, can do that ministry.

Activity Report

The Center for Reconciliation has made substantial progress since our last report to the diocese in 2015. Here is what we have achieved;

- The importance of this work continues to be affirmed. Events in Rhode Island and beyond confirm that conversations about racial reconciliation are needed and faith communities like ours can be effective facilitators of those conversations.
- We are a part of the “Dialogue Group” involved in ongoing conversations between federal, state, and local law enforcement officials and community leaders. We believe strengthening those relationships when there are no immediate crises is an investment that will pay dividends in the future.
- Our understanding of “reconciliation” continues to be refined as we have conversations both among ourselves and with “others/partners.” The definition of “reconciliation, like that of “grace” or “mercy” defies definitions that are too narrowly proscribed.
- The team of people involved in the work of the Center for Reconciliation continues to grow. Our primary focus at this time is on working with the congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island because we are accountable to that community. The Reconciliation Team of the Congregational Development Commission (CDC) is actively working with the CFR to identify and recommend resources for use in congregations to discuss racial reconciliation.
- We also understand the values of strategic partnerships with other organizations, both faith based and secular. For example, we organized a celebration of the Martin Luther King Day which attracted some 200 participants and involved over a dozen partner organizations including the Rhode Island for Community and Justice, the Opportunity Industrialization Center (OIC), The Urban League of Providence, Temple Beth-El, The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, The Rhode Island Historical Society, The Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice of Brown University, the Mixed Magic Theater and more.

- We partnered with Trinity Church, Wall Street in the webinar “Sacred Conversations for Racial Justice,” which was hosted by Trinity Church, Newport, St. Peter and Andrews, Providence and Christ Church, Westerly.
- We developed and implemented our first programs including Faith and Slavery Walking Tours, and a Lenten program on *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (which will be available along with training for leaders to use next year).
- Deacon Ricky Brightman has started a Cemetery Research Project.
- We have established a Young Adult Internship Program that had one Master’s degree student last spring who created an original play about the three black women buried in the Cathedral cemetery that was attended by 60+ participants who engaged in dialogue with a panel afterwards. This year we have a senior at Brown University who is conducting research that will expand our work on the Black congregations in the Benefit Street area in the context of the 1960’s urban renewal.
- The museum design team is just getting started, gathering an impressive list of participants from schools and museums as well as our own team members. A traveling exhibit is being designed that will be available to congregations in the coming months so we can begin to envision some of what might be displayed in the Cathedral when it is ready to receive visitors. The initial Cathedral renovations are now at the “getting bids” stage; storm damage to the library section has provided insurance funds to help renovate that space.
- Several of our staff and team members have been providing leadership at other events sometimes as an official CFR representative or on their own, but visible in the community as part of this work. They include:
 - James Perry’s presentations at Wheeler School, to the Organization of American Historians annual meeting in Providence, at Durant-Kenrick House on Black Lives Matter, and to the Diocese of Pennsylvania; and participation in the R.I Middle Passage and Port Marker Project and training workshops for the National Park Service and Royall House & Slave Quarters
 - Elon Cook’s presentation for the Daughters of the American Revolution, her participation in a panel discussion on historic sites at the Museum of the City of New York and her presentation on the Center for Reconciliation at Trinity Church, Wall Street
 - Joanne Pope Melish’s keynote and Elon’s presentations at the Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission Conference in South County
 - CFR and the Brown Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice staff led movie night discussions at Brown and the Providence library
 - David Ames’s presentation at an ecumenical gathering of clergy in Westerly
 - Screenings of the Traces of the Trade video at the three active Colonial Churches (St. Michael’s, Bristol, Trinity, Newport and St. Paul’s, Wickford); also at St. Elizabeth’s Church, Hope Valley and for the Blackstone Deanery
 - Pam McDonald’s leadership with the Westerly Area Peace and Justice Group sponsored by Christ Church which is organizing the Film Series, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, at Westerly Library.
- There are other important accomplishments to report:
 - We implemented organizational and governance structures
 - We expanded Board of Directors to include the Rt. Rev. Jeffrey Williams (Kings Cathedral) and Dr. Morgan Grefe (RIHS)

- We successfully conducted “soft phase” fundraising initiatives to support program expenses including c. \$3,000 in program fees/donations and c. \$30,000 in grants, corporate and individual donations.

The CFR is now incorporating volunteers into its work and welcomes those who have gifts and skills to offer. We need everything from people who want to help plan programs, provide administrative support, serve as tour assistants, fundraisers, event planners/hosts, and more. Contact Elon@cfri.org to volunteer or for more information about coming programs and events.

Respectfully submitted,

The Center for Reconciliation

Board Members:

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Nicholas Knisely, President
The Rev. David Dobbins, Vice President
Mr. Robert Batchelor, Treasurer
Ms. Ruth Moulton, bookkeeper and clerk
The Rev. Dr. David A. Ames
Dr. Morgan Grefe (RI Historical Society)
The Ven. Janice Grinnell
Dr. Delbert C. Glover
The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey Williams (Kings Cathedral)

Coordinating Committee Team Members:

The Rev. Dr. David Ames
The Rev. Dr. Dorothy (Ricky) Brightman,
The Rev. Brett Betkoski (Trinity Lutheran Church - Centerbrook, CT)
Dr. Delbert C. Glover
Ms. Ann Hamm
Ms. Pam McDonald
Dr. Joanne Pope Melish
Mr. Jonathan Shay (Presbyterian Church, CT)
The Rev. Canon Linda L. Grenz, diocesan staff support
Mr. James DeWolf Perry, Executive Director (part-time)
Ms. Elon Cook, Program Manager and Museum Curator (part-time)