

Reparations Fund Proposal – First Church in Cambridge, May 2021

Submitted to Executive Council by the Exploring Reparations Faith and Life Group, the Beloved Community Group and the Missions and Social Justice Committee

Approved by the Executive Council on May 24, 2021

1. Introduction

For more than three years, First Church members have explored the topic of financial reparations to address the generational harms perpetuated against people of African and Indigenous descent in our country, and specifically, individuals in our church community. Many of us have felt called by the Spirit to implement individual reparations practices.

Many of us also feel moved to work together toward a collective reparations effort, in the conviction that individual reparations are insufficient. The topic of institutional reparations came up most recently in the April 18 discussion with First Church members about the focus groups convened by Karlene Griffiths Sekou. Members of the focus groups, comprising people most impacted by the harms of white supremacy, named institutional reparations as one of the key ways to begin repair and restitution. Separately, the subject of institutional reparations also came up in the Exploring Reparations Faith & Life group and in Building Beloved Community meetings.

While we will continue to study other reparations processes that may inform and improve our efforts, we are aware that the desire to “study the landscape more” to “get it right” can unnecessarily postpone meaningful action. We feel it is important to start now with an initial collective effort, in the form of a seed-stage First Church Reparations Fund that would be funded by individual contributions. We would like to contribute to the Reparations Fund as a way to invite us all to explore the possibility of a future institutional commitment to racial reparations. We are asking the Executive Council to create a dedicated reparations account that can receive individual contributions.

Our vision for this Fund is that it would be an opportunity for us to engage and experience the spiritual practice of repentance and relinquishment as an expression of our faith. We acknowledge that the brutal history and its modern consequences afflict economic harm, so we commit our financial resources as a way to help ameliorate, even if in a small way, suffering from which we have benefitted. We would entrust these funds into the capable hands of a Collective of BIPOC community members who are trusted and closest to the needs, and who will determine a process for distribution of funds.

Other key elements of this initial Reparations Fund include:

- We affirm that contributions to the Reparations Fund will not come at the expense of our regular FCC contributions but that they will be “over and above” our pledges for the FCC annual budget. We come to this table with a sense of abundance and faith.

- Membership in the Collective is still being discussed, but will largely be filled by impacted community members. This group of 6-8 individuals is yet to be determined.
- The Collective will determine an approach for allocating funds, will identify one or more local 501(c)3 organizations to receive the funds, and will specify the amount to go to the identified organizations.
- In accordance with our financial procedures, EC will approve the disbursement of funds to the organizations and in the amounts determined by the Collective.
- First Church will receive annual reports from the Collective of how funds were used, and what community needs were addressed, in order to inform prayers and giving.
- We will share the establishment of the Fund through a Ministry Moment and at an upcoming 9:30 hour on Reparations, and will invite others to join us, but will not otherwise undertake a formal fundraising effort this spring.
- We will encourage initial contributions to be made by [date TBD - we are considering some time in June, if possible], and we hope that a first round of disbursement could begin this summer.
- However, the reparations fund would remain open indefinitely and for recurring contributions, and we expect that there would be further rounds of giving and disbursement beyond this summer. We trust that we will learn from this initial collaborative action, and that ongoing reflection and conversation will help us to discern where God is calling us next.

We see the Reparations Fund as the next step to fully living out our anti-racist commitments. As Executive Council affirmed in our vision for being an anti-racist church:

We commit to use, share, and relinquish whatever power and privilege we may have to dismantle systemic racism in our wider community by joining the struggle alongside other antiracist organizations, centering the voices of those who have been traditionally silenced or oppressed, and following the lead of Black and Indigenous people and all People of Color.

Establishing a Reparations Fund is just one of many actions that First Church has taken and will take in its journey to become an anti-racist church -- and we believe it is an essential step.

We hope that, after discussion, Executive Council will support our efforts by:

1. Voting to establish the Reparations Fund. Please see the following draft resolution.
2. Convening further conversations about reparations. We believe that, in God's time, the congregation will be led by the Spirit to commit institutional resources to the FCC reparations Fund (i.e., from the annual budget), but we recognize that more discussion and prayer is necessary before we take this step as a congregation.
3. Committing, in this initial stage, to receive and approve recommendations for disbursement from the Collective.

2. Proposal to Create a Reparations Fund at First Church (draft EC resolution, for discussion)

Whereas enslavement of Africans and Indigenous persons was an evil and systematic injustice committed against persons of African and Indigenous descent from which the United States, and white institutions and persons, benefitted in the past and continue to benefit and build wealth,

Whereas, as a church, we acknowledge the willful participation of our church forebearers in the enslavement of Africans and Indigenous persons,

Whereas we acknowledge that First Church has benefitted and garnered wealth from these actions,

Whereas, the *Exploring Reparations Faith and Life Group* has discussed the topic of reparations at a personal, local (church and community), and national level, and some members have expressed interest in contributing directly to a reparations fund, and

Whereas there are funds currently remaining at First Church from private donations made to the Remembrance Project, some of which can serve as seed funding for the Reparations Fund, and

Whereas the members of the Beloved Community group have discussed this matter, and Beloved Community brings it forth as a recommendation to the Executive Council that such a Fund be established,

Therefore, it is proposed that the Executive Council vote to establish a Reparations Fund to receive donations from individuals and to disburse them to one or more 501(c)3 organizations based on the recommendation of a Collective of impacted community members. Further refinements to this process may be considered at a future time.