

**Frequently Asked Questions:
Reparative Justice and the Proposed Reparative Justice Fund
Updated August 18, 2025**

How has the Presbytery of Baltimore contributed to or benefitted from systemic racism?

The Dismantling Racism Team has identified four key categories of harms to which the Presbytery contributed or from which it benefitted: direct benefits (e.g., in the form of monetary support from sources tied to slavery); historic underinvestment and neglect; inequities in the management of church properties; and direct violations of trust between the Presbytery and communities or congregations of color.

Why now?

The 2022 General Assembly, adopted the overture, “An Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and its Legacy” from Gittings-Lovejoy¹. The Presbytery of Baltimore offered a formal concurrence for the overture, which committed the PCUSA to restorative justice and reparations, informed by a closer study of our history. This is also in keeping with our strategic values and priorities established in 2023. The Rev. Jermaine Ross-Allam, the Director of the PCUSA Center for the Repair of Historical Harm, has called on churches and church institutions to engage in the work of repair “as soon as possible,” and “for as long as it takes.” It is past time for the Presbytery to act. If the foundation of your home was damaged, wouldn’t you act to make sure it was repaired as soon as possible?

Where did this proposal originate?

The Reparative Justice Working Group was chartered in August of 2022 by the Dismantling Racism Team. The Working Group is made up of clergy and ruling elders from Knox, Govans, Light Street, Christ our Anchor and Faith Presbyterian Churches, a validated ministry and Presbytery staff.

What is our definition of Reparations?

Reparations at its most basic acknowledges past harms and provides economic compensation. Following the lead of the PCUSA’s Center for Repair of Historical Harms, we reserve the term “reparations” for actions that could be taken at the federal level by the United States government. In the U.S., reparations are most often focused on the debt owed because of the institution of slavery and its legacy. The term “reparations” has also been used in the context of the U.S. treatment of Native American communities. And in 1988, the US Government provided \$20,000 each to Japanese American survivors of the internment camps during World War II.

¹ The full overture can be found here: <https://www.pc-biz.org/search/3000895>

What do we mean by Repair and Reparative Justice?

Terms such as “repair,” “reparative action,” or “reparative justice” encompass actions taken by institutions or individuals. Therefore, we refer to an action taken by the Presbytery as repair. We speak of “reparative” justice insofar as it includes repair of relationships that have always been broken since the founding of our country (and denomination).

How are these funds different from grants?

Grants are typically awarded with continued oversight from the source of the funds, while repair funds are freely and voluntarily given, to pay a historical debt that has until now remained unacknowledged. In relinquishing these resources, the Presbytery demonstrates its trust that the affected groups know what they need and how best to use the funds for repair. Therefore, it is our intention that the money will be disbursed to enable the work of repair without onerous reporting requirements as might be required for a grant. Ultimately, the board will determine to whom and how the disbursements will be made.

What are the Historically and Predominantly Black Churches and how many are there in the Presbytery?

There are 6 historically/predominantly Black congregations in the Baltimore Presbytery: Cherry Hill Community Presbyterian, Grace Presbyterian, Knox Presbyterian, Lochearn Presbyterian, Madison Avenue Presbyterian, and Trinity Presbyterian.

Why is this a church matter?

The work of repair is grounded in our theological understanding that God created human beings to be in relationship with one another. Indeed, Christ calls us to be reconciled with one another and with God (Matthew 22:39). Dr. William Yoo, associate professor at Columbia Theological Seminary and proponent of repair, states it this way: “. . .we must see our church as it is: the work of saints and sinners who did both good and evil, all in the name of God.” He goes on to say: “Our practices of confessing corporate sin and bearing mutual responsibility inform and inspire how we may engage Black racial repair in the PC(USA) today.”²

Who would benefit from this fund?

Funds will go to support majority-Black churches, Black-led community groups and nonprofits, within the geographical area of the Presbytery. It is our intention that the repair work enabled by the Fund will benefit those whose ancestors were enslaved as well as those impacted by its legacy and other forms of systemic racial oppression. It will be the responsibility of the new Board to further define eligibility criteria.

² Yoo, William, “The case for Black racial repair in the PCUSA,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, *Reparative Justice*, p. 19-23

Why is the fund limited to Black people/African Americans?

The focus of this initial proposal is to address the harms against African Americans for two reasons. First, it was a natural next-step after our Presbytery's apology for the sin of slavery and its legacy. Second, the Working Group had read and heard stories about the harms against African American churches and leaders within the Presbytery which impelled them to learn more. The histories and actions that were uncovered during this study, therefore, were focused on African Americans and Black communities. Additional work would be needed to uncover historical harm against Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities to include participation from these groups before we could make a subsequent recommendation.

Who will control the money?

The Reparative Justice Fund shall be managed by a separate legal fiduciary directed by a Board of Directors composed of leaders from within the impacted communities. We propose the incorporating Board consist of 9 members, 4 from within the Presbytery of Baltimore and 5 from the wider community within the geographical bounds of the Presbytery. This new charitable entity will be founded by the Presbytery but operate as a separate entity, under the laws of the State of Maryland.

Have similar funds been created before?

Yes, the Reparations Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of MD operates a \$1.39 million fund. On October 5, 2020, the Synod of Lakes and Prairies approved the dedication of \$351,000, representing 15% of its accumulated wealth (undesignated/unrestricted net assets), to seed potential Churchwide efforts and established the "Restorative Actions" fund. Memorial Episcopal Church in Baltimore established the Guy T. Holliday Memorial Justice & Reparations Initiative with an initial commitment of \$500,000 over 5 years.

Why is 15% the amount recommended?

The 15% recommendation comes from studies on the racial wealth gap in the United States between White and African-American households. According to a 2024 report from the Brookings Institution, the wealth gap is actually increasing.

What would be the financial impact on the Presbytery?

The Presbytery is blessed with significant reserves thanks to careful stewardship over the years and the sale of church properties. The specific amount will depend in part on the payment schedule for transferring the funds. For example, if the Presbytery were to have transferred \$500,000 into the fund at the beginning of 2025, the impact on the 2025 budget would be less than \$20,000 in projected income toward this year's budget.

When will the money be transferred from the Presbytery to the new fund?

The Dismantling Racism Team and leaders we have consulted believe strongly that the funds should be released at one time. Delays would mean less capital to work with initially, which means the board may not be able to make meaningful change where change is desperately needed. Delay, even on an approved schedule, could also create uncertainty for the newly formed Board. Finally, a drawn-out period could become messy. While the Presbytery might approve 15% from today's funds, unrestricted Presbytery dollars fluctuate, increasing the possibility of dissension and distrust over how much is actually owed.

Why should a percentage of future property sales continue to be contributed to the fund?

This work is iterative and ongoing. As quoted in the question, "Why now?" the Rev. Jermaine Ross-Allam, has called on churches and church institutions to engage in the work of repair "for as long as it takes." The Presbytery's commitment to continue to tithe to support the Reparative Justice Fund is a powerful testimony to the importance of the work of repair and the need to continue to support it into the future.

Will money from the fund be used specifically to help the historically and predominantly Black churches in the Presbytery?

Yes, a minimum of 25% up to one-third of the fund will be designated for use solely by the 6 congregations listed above, because we believe that addressing these congregations is critical. Of course, the Board of Directors can decide to designate even more to these PCUSA churches. We also acknowledge that actions by the Presbytery have also harmed neighborhoods where we have served and stopped serving. The Dismantling Racism Team believes it is imperative that the Board be free to work for the betterment of God's kingdom both within and outside the walls of our churches. This is in keeping with the goals of the Next Generation Initiative Committee of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, as well.

What's the timeline for beginning the work enabled by the fund?

Not surprisingly, wrongs that have been embedded in our nation and our Presbytery for centuries cannot be done overnight. The Dismantling Racism Team has been working long and hard for 2 years to reach this historic moment. Once the Presbytery approves the fund, much work must be done to establish a 501(c)(3), by-laws, and organizing board. We anticipate bringing these back to the Presbytery by the May Gathering in 2026. Once finalized and approved, the work of monetarily supporting our predominantly Black churches and communities can begin.

How can I get involved?

Once the fund receives Presbytery approval, there will be much work to be done, such as setting up a 501(c)(3), creating a board of directors, and more. The Presbytery will need people with legal expertise, investment experience, and a knowledge of community organizations doing impactful work to help move this work forward. Volunteer for a working group established for one of these purposes.

Ongoing, we recognize that financial repair is just one step in the process. We must continue to fight racism in its many guises. If your congregation doesn't have an antiracism team, consider starting one. If you do have one and you're not already a member, join! If your church is not a Matthew 25 congregation, begin the work to become one. Make sure your congregation has a meaningful antiracism policy, as mandated by the General Assembly. Encourage your church leaders to study their history, honestly and openly, with an eye to how it may have benefitted from past racist policies. Volunteer to help the Dismantling Racism Team (DRT) in the work we're doing. And remember, the DRT stands ready to help congregations with their antiracism work.

Next Steps

2025:

- May 22 - Presbytery presentation with discussion on proposed action
- August 18 - Second Q & A session on the proposal
- September 8 - Third Q & A session on the proposal
- September 13 - Presbytery votes on the proposal at the 908th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Baltimore

2026 (Pending Approval):

- March: 910th Presbytery meeting – Present written progress report to the Presbytery of Baltimore
- May: 911th Presbytery meeting:
 - Present draft legal documents and nominees to the incorporating Board to the Presbytery of Baltimore for approval
- Introduce Incorporating Board members to the Presbytery
- Fall 2026 and beyond:
 - Share progress reports of the new Board in developing funding criteria and selection of awards
 - Continue the work of dismantling racism in the Presbytery of Baltimore through the Dismantling Racism Team and local congregations

Where can I learn more?

Articles

Andre M. Perry, Hannah Stephens, and Manann Donoghoe, “Black wealth is increasing but so is the racial wealth gap,” Brookings Institution, January 9, 2024.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/black-wealth-is-increasing-but-so-is-the-racial-wealth-gap/>

Rev. Dr. Jermaine Ross-Allam, PCUSA Director of the Center for Repair of Historical Harms, [*Breaking the Miller Cycle: The Center for the Repair of Historical Harms and the Ministry of Planetary Peace*](#)

Yoo, William “The case for Black racial repair in the PCUSA,” [*Reparations: How do we right the wrongs of history? \(Special Issue\) The Presbyterian Outlook*](#). September 2024. - some copies are available from the Presbytery.

Videos

News Coverage of PCUSA efforts at repair: [Channel 5 Cleveland News Report on Repair Effort at Forest Hills Presbyterian Church](#) PCUSA Apology and Repair with Indigenous Community

[Steps toward Repair at Northern Lights United Church, Juneau, Alaska](#)

[Rev. Dr. Jermaine Ross-Allam plenary on “Repair of Historic Harms”](#) at the *Matthew 25 Mid-Atlantic Summit* (begins at 51:34)

Books

Turner, Robert, *Creating A Culture of Repair: Taking action on the road to reparations*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2024.

Yoo, William, *What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022