SEVEN
CHURCHES
ONE COMMUNITY
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW

FAITH
UNITY
CULTURE
COMMUNITY
A SHARED
TOMORROW

SABA

Brethren Dwelling Together in Unity

Psalm 133:1

Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church | Grace Presbyterian Church | Knox Presbyterian Church | Lochearn Presbyterian Church

Trinity Presbyterian Church | Cherry Hill Community Presbyterian Church | Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church

November 17, 2026

A CALL TO REMEMBER, REPAIR, AND BUILD TOGETHER

To the Stated Clerk, Moderator, Ministers, Elders, and Members of the Presbytery of Baltimore:

In Exodus 3:7, God declares:

"I have observed the misery of my people. I have heard their cry.

Indeed, I know their sufferings."

These are not merely words about a distant people in an ancient story. They reveal the heart of a God who sees what others overlook, hears what others dismiss, and calls His people to respond when suffering demands more than sympathy.

Today, we introduce **SABA**, a collective of seven African American Presbyterian congregations united by faith, shared history, and a commitment to strengthening our churches, our communities, and the opportunities available to future generations.

In Swahili, *Saba* means seven.

The seven congregations of SABA are:

1. **Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church**
2. **Grace Presbyterian Church**
3. **Knox Presbyterian Church**
4. **Cherry Hill Community Presbyterian Church**
5. **Lochearn Presbyterian Church**
6. **Trinity Presbyterian Church**
7. **Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church**

Together, these congregations represent a shared commitment to honoring our history, strengthening our present, and building a future rooted in faith, unity, love, and collective responsibility.

The history of African American Presbyterian congregations is not a footnote in the history of the Presbytery of Baltimore. It is part of its foundation, its witness, and its sacred inheritance.

In 1842, Black Presbyterians began gathering in Baltimore through a mission of First Presbyterian Church. On April 24, 1848, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church was formally organized to serve a primarily Black congregation. These beginnings took place in a society shaped by slavery, racial exclusion, and profound inequality. Yet our ancestors built a witness that outlived the restrictions placed upon them. They established congregations, nurtured faith, educated generations, developed leaders, and served communities that too often had been overlooked and underserved. Their contributions were not incidental to the life of Presbyterianism in Baltimore. They were foundational, transformative, and enduring.

Their legacy continued well beyond the nineteenth century. The Rev. Dr. William W. Walker, pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church from 1919 to 1942, later helped lead efforts to end segregation in the denomination's General Assembly. His leadership reminds us that African American Presbyterians did not simply endure the Church's history. They helped shape it, challenge it, and change it. We honor our ancestors not by romanticizing their struggles, but by acknowledging their sacrifices, celebrating their accomplishments, and recognizing the injustices they endured. They remained faithful while navigating a society and a Church in which racism, segregation, exclusion, and unequal access to resources created barriers to opportunity and wounded relationships. Their perseverance reminds us that faith is not simply what we profess. Faith is also reflected in how we respond to injustice, how we treat one another, and how we work to create a more compassionate and equitable future.

Today, we are called not only to remember, but also to love, reflect, forgive, reconcile, and pledge ourselves to the work of building together.

We recognize that genuine reconciliation requires honesty about the past, humility in the present, and a shared commitment to a different future. Forgiveness does not require us to forget the suffering of our ancestors, nor does it diminish the importance of accountability. Rather, it invites us to move forward with open hearts, renewed understanding, and a willingness to transform painful history into meaningful progress.

SABA sincerely appreciates and acknowledges the steps that the Presbytery of Baltimore has willingly undertaken toward addressing and repairing the historical injustices endured by our ancestors. In particular, we recognize the Presbytery's September 2025 action establishing a Reparative Justice Fund as an important expression of institutional reflection, responsibility, and commitment to meaningful change. We receive these efforts with appreciation and hope, recognizing that the journey toward reconciliation is not defined by one decision or one initiative. It is an ongoing commitment that must be demonstrated through relationships, communication, mutual respect, shared responsibility, and sustained action.

We believe this moment presents an opportunity to build upon the progress already made and deepen the relationship between SABA and the Presbytery of Baltimore. Our desire is not to remain divided by the injustices of yesterday, but to work together to create a stronger, more inclusive, and more faithful Church for tomorrow.

We extend our hands in partnership and our hearts in a spirit of Christian love, forgiveness, and unity.

SABA looks forward to establishing a strong, meaningful, and lasting partnership with the Presbytery of Baltimore, one that prioritizes open and transparent communication, mutual understanding, intentional collaboration, and a shared commitment to strengthening African American Presbyterian congregations. We believe communication must be more than the exchange of information. It must create opportunities for listening, relationship-building, shared decision-making, and the recognition that every congregation has valuable experiences, perspectives, and gifts to contribute.

Our hope is to foster a relationship in which concerns can be expressed openly, voices are genuinely heard, commitments are honored, and opportunities for collaboration are pursued with sincerity and purpose. We are not asking the Church to dwell in the pain of its past. We are inviting the Church to demonstrate what it has learned from that past through the strength of its relationships and the integrity of its actions today. It is within this spirit of reflection, reconciliation, and possibility that SABA seeks to move forward. Our collective vision is to

strengthen African American Presbyterian congregations through unity, economic empowerment, leadership development, congregational sustainability, historical preservation, community engagement, and the cultivation of opportunities for generations yet unborn.

We envision congregations that share resources, exchange knowledge, develop leaders, support one another through challenges, and work collaboratively to expand their impact within the communities they serve. We recognize that the strength of the Church is not measured solely by the resources of its largest congregations, but also by its willingness to invest in the vitality, dignity, and sustainability of every congregation within its fellowship.

SABA is not an effort to create another division within the Presbyterian Church. Rather, it is an intentional effort to strengthen relationships, celebrate our shared heritage, and create greater opportunities for collective growth. We believe that when congregations work together, their individual strengths become a collective witness to what is possible through faith, cooperation, and unity.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12 that the body is one, though it has many members.

That truth places a sacred responsibility upon all of us.

We cannot claim to be one body if the well-being of one member is treated as separate from the well-being of the whole. When one congregation struggles, we are all called to care. When one congregation flourishes, we all share in its joy. When one congregation's voice is heard and valued, the entire Church becomes stronger.

Our calling, therefore, is not simply to acknowledge our interconnectedness, but to live it. We are called to love one another beyond our differences, to reflect upon our collective history with honesty, to extend forgiveness with grace, and to work intentionally toward reconciliation and lasting unity. Let us replace distance with dialogue, misunderstanding with compassion, silence with meaningful communication, and division with a renewed commitment to partnership. Let us recognize that reconciliation is not the conclusion of a difficult conversation. It is the beginning of a shared responsibility. Consider what has been entrusted to this generation.

We worship in places our ancestors struggled to establish. We inherit opportunities they were denied. We stand upon foundations laid by hands that often labored without recognition. We are beneficiaries of prayers we did not pray, sacrifices we did not make, and doors opened by people who may never have lived to walk through them. Their sacrifices require more of us than remembrance alone. They call us to become faithful stewards of the opportunities they helped create and courageous partners in building a Church worthy of the generations that will follow.

What, then, is our responsibility?

Isaiah 58:12 gives us a charge:

"You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in."

May that not be merely a beautiful description of the Church.

May it become the work we are willing to undertake together. Let us repair what history has fractured. Let us strengthen what generations have sustained. Let us build relationships that are rooted in trust, sustained through honest communication, and strengthened by a shared commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Let us approach one another not as adversaries separated by history, but as brothers and sisters in Christ who recognize that our common faith calls us toward a greater purpose. Let us be willing to listen with humility, speak with love, forgive with sincerity, and act with courage. Most importantly, let us pledge to work together, recognizing that the challenges facing our congregations cannot be addressed through isolated efforts alone. The future of our churches is a shared responsibility, and the opportunity to strengthen them is a shared blessing.

SABA welcomes the opportunity to walk alongside the Presbytery of Baltimore in a spirit of partnership, mutual respect, accountability, and Christian fellowship. We believe that by working together, we can honor the sacrifices of our ancestors, strengthen the congregations entrusted to our care, and demonstrate to future generations the

transformative power of unity, reconciliation, and love. Our ancestors left us more than a history to honor. They left us a responsibility to fulfill.

May those who come after us be able to look back upon this moment and say:

This generation remembered. This generation reflected. This generation listened. This generation extended grace and forgiveness. This generation chose reconciliation over division and partnership over isolation. This generation chose to build together.

For we are not merely the inheritors of history. We are the builders of what comes next.

Respectfully and prayerfully,

On behalf of SABA

Seven Congregations United in Faith, Fellowship, and Purpose

Rev. Dr. Ron Hankins, Sr.
Moderator