

Reparative Justice Frequently Asked Questions

By the Dismantling Racism Team of the Presbytery of Baltimore

May 19, 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.

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.

What do we mean by Repair & Reparative Justice?

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

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.”¹

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.

Why is the fund limited to Blacks and African Americans?

The focus of this initial proposal is to address the harms against African Americans for two reasons: we had access to persons and stories about the harms against African Americans, and leadership from within the impacted group. 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, involving participation from these groups.

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. The incorporating Board would consist of 9 members, three of whom are from within the Presbytery of Baltimore and six 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.

¹ Yoo, William, “The case for Black racial repair in the PCUSA,” The Presbyterian Outlook, September 2024, p. 19-23

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 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 from its reserves.

What is the difference between repair and a grant?

Grants are typically awarded with continued oversight from the source of the funds, while repair funds are freely or voluntarily given, as a servicing of 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.

Why now?

At the 2022 General Assembly, the overture “An Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and its Legacy” from Gittings-Lovejoy was adopted. 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, Faith Presbyterian Churches, and a validated ministry with Presbytery staff support.

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," The Presbyterian Outlook, September 2024.

Reparations: How do we right the wrongs of history?, The Presbyterian Outlook, September 2024 issue. <https://pres-outlook.org/issues/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) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4dwcs3Dikg&t=1s>

Synod of Lakes and Prairies Presentation -- [PowerPoint Presentation on U.S. Wealth Gap](#)

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

Next Steps

May 22, 2025 - Presbytery presentation with discussion on proposed action.

September date TBD - Second Q & A session on the proposal

September 13, 2025 - Presbytery votes on the proposal at the 908th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Baltimore at Central Presbyterian Church.