

A proposal of the Dismantling Racism Team of the Presbytery of Baltimore to Create a Reparative Justice Fund May 2025

I. Invocation

In January of 2022, the Presbytery of Baltimore (POB) concurred with overture RGJ-08, “An Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy.” In so doing, we declared as a Presbytery that the next steps in our journey would be “apology, history, and restorative action.” As people of faith, we acknowledge that scripture and theology have long been used to justify and rationalize racial injustice, not only in the form of slavery but also to perpetuate a status quo of entrenched racial inequity. We reject this misuse of scripture and believe there is a more faithful interpretation of our shared redemption history. Indeed, the voices of prophets ring out from the text, calling God’s people into right relationship, as evidenced by love of God and neighbor, and work for justice.¹

The Hebrew people’s liberation from slavery is a foundational Biblical story. After their enslavement under Pharaoh, the Israelites are paid gold and silver by their former oppressors as reparations. (Exodus 12:35b-36) Likewise, Jerusalem receives reparations when the people return from exile: King Darius uses the royal treasury to make reparative payment to the people even though he was not the king who forced them to abandon their homeland. (Ezra 6:1-12) Repeatedly in scripture, reparations are used as a tool to establish equity and enable new futures.²

In “Reparations...What is Owed?”,³ presented by the In the Loop Ministry Group, Rev. Mary Speers pointed to the words of Jesus in Luke’s gospel: “I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.” (Luke 16:9) Taking reparative action is more than charity or generosity. Indeed, it is the next step to begin to rectify past wrongs and bring justice for the people harmed. Rev. Speers taught that people of faith are compelled to put the dishonest wealth accumulated through slavery and white supremacist policies and practices towards the work of repair, making friends with those who have been wronged.

Our calling to the work of repair is grounded in our theological understanding that human beings are created to be in relationship with one another. When relationships have been broken, people of faith must acknowledge and repent of wrongdoing, repair harm done, and seek reconciliation.⁴ Indeed, Christ calls us to be reconciled with one another and with God; reparative action moves us toward true reconciliation. (Matthew 22:39) As Dr. William Yoo has stated, “There is no redemption without restoration; there is no deliverance without atonement. As Christians, we [are] ...motivated, as God’s agents of reconciliation, to act justly and work toward ending racial discrimination in the world we have inherited and now inhabit.”⁵

¹ Examples: Micah 6:8; Jeremiah 22:03; Amos 5:24; Deut. 16:18, 20 and 24:14-15; Isa. 58:6; Mt.25:31–40

² See Numbers 5:6-7, Leviticus 6:1-7, Matthew 5:23-24, to name a few.

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_Me0rqpe2U

⁴ Chavez Saucedo, Teresa and T Benicio Gonzales, *Called to Live as God’s People: A Study Guide to the Report of the Task Force to Study Reparations*, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, PC(USA), 2012, p. 9

⁵ Yoo, William, “The case for Black racial repair in the PCUSA,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 206.8, September 2024, p.19.

In doing this work, we seek to repair the breach (*Isaiah 58:12*) that the sin of slavery and the legacy of white supremacy have made between us. If we are to be “doers of the word and not hearers only,” (*James 1:22*) we believe it is time to move beyond apology into embodied witness and action. Rev. Michael Woolf points out that churches are “spaces where reparations are uniquely possible” because, being rooted in particular places, “memories of harm and past wrongdoing tend to linger and reverberate; but with this deep woundedness comes the potential for accountability.”⁶

The time is now! Maryland repealed chattel slavery 160 years ago. Congress introduced HR40 35 years ago, calling for a commission to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans. In November 2023, the POB signed on as an official Matthew 25 Presbytery. This is not just political work; it is spiritual work that has the potential to transform all of us as we live more deeply into God’s design for the Beloved Community.

II. Introduction

A. Charge and Accountability

The POB Dismantling Racism Team established the Reparative Justice Working Group in August 2022.⁷ The Working Group was asked to recommend actions that the POB might take to address harm perpetrated, both directly and indirectly, against African Americans and other people of color within the boundaries of the Presbytery. Aware of the negative impact of structural racism on all communities of color, we are especially interested in the history and experience of African American congregations in the Presbytery. The Working Group is made up of ministers of word and sacrament and ruling elders from Knox, Govans, Light Street, Christ our Anchor, and Faith Presbyterian Churches and validated ministry.

The Working Group recommendations are informed by both denominational and Presbytery history, as well as by current efforts being undertaken by other faith communities. Recognizing that the official historical records are incomplete, the Working Group has supplemented its research with other sources, such as oral history from local congregations.

As the working group learned more about the different approaches, it was decided to narrow the focus of this initial proposal to the harms against African Americans for two reasons: the harms against African Americans, Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities are not all the same, and leadership from within the impacted group should be central to defining the appropriate reparative action(s).

B. Summary of Proposal

Our goal is to develop a model for a reparative trust, administered by Black leaders, that would prioritize local impact for historically and majority Black congregations, neighborhoods, community and nonprofit organizations within the geographic bounds of the Presbytery. We propose, therefore, that the Presbytery of Baltimore establish a Reparative Justice Fund (RJF) to repair historic harms through support for the self-development of African American communities and congregations. We propose the RJF be directed by representatives from those communities and managed by a separate legal fiduciary, outside of the Presbytery of Baltimore.

⁶ Woolf, Michael, “What Reparations is Costing My Church,” Sojourners, 2/23/22, <https://sojo.net/articles/what-reparations-costing-my-church>

⁷ The working group was originally established as the “Restorative Justice Working Group.” For an explanation of the change in language used, see II. C Language used.

While in some cases individual inequities or injustices can be quantified, such estimates never fully capture the magnitude of accumulated wealth disparities. To that end, this proposal is based on the estimated national financial disparities between the income and wealth of white American households and the income and wealth of households in historically marginalized African American communities. Building on an initial seed fund of approximately \$150,000 from the legacy of The Center, we propose that 15% of the unrestricted accumulated wealth of the Presbytery of Baltimore, and 10% of gains from future sales of real estate, be allocated to this fund.

While we acknowledge the importance of, and commit ourselves to, continued education and study, the fund is intended specifically for self-directed projects and initiatives of impacted communities; as such, efforts led or directed by majority white churches should not be beneficiaries of the fund. The specific actions proposed for the Presbytery are outlined more fully at the end of the document.

C. Language Used

It is prudent to lay out explicitly some of the intentional decisions that we have made regarding the language used in this rationale.

We believe the term “reparations” should be reserved for holistic action taken at the national level as a matter of federal policy; in this sense, we draw a distinction between actions that are, or are intended to be, reparative and societal reparations. Additionally, we speak of “reparative justice” and “acts of repair” rather than of “restorative justice” because restoration implies a return to a previously existing status. Here, we are attempting to provide a means to repair historic harms and injustices, in an effort to realize a more just and equitable society than has existed previously. To that end, we assert that continued acts of charity and mission, even in service of communities that have been impacted in the ways considered here, do not constitute reparative action.

Regarding the disbursements to be made from the proposed Fund, we do not refer to “grants” or “gifts.” Grants are disbursed in funding programs that are often controlled and owned by those who already wield wealth and power; such wealth is not relinquished to the grantee, who is often restricted in the use of the funding and/or by reporting requirements. A gift is freely or voluntarily donated or given without compensation. We see the disbursement proposed here as the servicing of a historic debt. We believe it is important that wealth contributed to the proposed Fund is wealth that is relinquished, not donated, without strings attached (e.g. onerous applications or reporting requirements).

In the context of our historical motivation and rationale, we have referenced a variety of materials, including books and newspaper articles. In general, these materials are the product of individuals who carried with them their own biases and perspectives of their contemporary environment. These perspectives are shared without explicit critique in some cases, but this should not be interpreted as an endorsement of those views or perspectives but as necessary context for understanding the historic harms in which the Presbytery of Baltimore has implicated itself by action or inaction. Where sources are directly quoted, we have made no attempt to modernize language, in particular language used to refer to Black individuals or people of color in general. Beyond such quotations, we have used the terms “Black” and “African American” interchangeably, reflecting our best understanding of the most appropriate and inoffensive usage at the time of writing.⁸

⁸ For the purposes of this proposal, we choose to use the term Black and African American. It is our intention that the repair work enabled by the Fund will be to the benefit of Black people, institutions, and community groups, inclusive of those whose ancestors were enslaved as well as those impacted by its legacy and other forms of systemic racial oppression.

III. Background: Reckoning With Our Past and Looking Forward

A. History

In the Presbytery of Baltimore's concurrence to overture RGJ-08, "An Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and Its Legacy," at the General Assembly of 2022, we discussed the history of racial inequities and our Presbytery's participation or complicity in them. We here recapitulate those arguments and add to them, with more detailed case studies supporting these core observations given later in this section.

The long history of racial injustice in the United States began with 250 years of institutional chattel slavery, and the rapid expansion of the Presbytery of Baltimore in the mid-19th century, including the founding of several churches still active today, could not have been accomplished without material support from the active enslavement of people, on which a large segment of the American economy of the time was based. Indeed, census reports from 1850 and 1860 show that leaders from several churches in the Presbytery, including First and Central Presbyterian Churches, enslaved people.

The Civil War was a divisive time for Maryland, and at the General Assembly of 1861, the commissioners from the Presbytery of Baltimore voted against the Gardiner Spring Resolutions, which committed the Presbyterian church to support "the integrity of these United States," "strengthen, uphold, and encourage the Federal Government," and "profess our unabated loyalty" to the Constitution, instead joining Dr. Charles Hodge's protest motion on the grounds that secession was a political matter beyond the domain of the church. With the split of the denomination following the adoption of the resolutions, some churches, such as Franklin Street Presbyterian, left the denomination, while some individuals, such as Rev. J. Henry Kaufman, then the founding Pastor of what is now Light Street Presbyterian Church, moved south to pastor for churches in the newly formed Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America.

Our nation's legacy of racism continued after the Civil War with another 100 years of Jim Crow laws, persisting well into the 20th century. While the PCUSA maintained a Board of Missions for Freedman whose primary focus was the establishment of schools for formerly enslaved Black youth in the south, we now know that the Presbytery of Baltimore contributed less to that mission, both as compared to other Presbyteries and as compared to its support for other missions, favoring spending on other social foci such as unemployment and temperance, even as Jim Crow erased the gains made towards racial equality during Reconstruction.

Progressive legislation of the mid-20th century that fueled upward mobility into the middle class for many Americans, including the GI Bill and Social Security, were explicitly written to exclude Black Americans. The culmination of these injustices are racial disparities in health, education, criminal justice, and economic and environmental well-being that persist until today. We see these racial disparities within the Presbytery as well, documenting multiple instances of racial disparities in the management and transfer of church properties, in the prevalence of historically and majority Black churches without installed pastors, and in racial representation on administrative commissions, through the 20th and into the 21st centuries.

Until now, the Presbytery of Baltimore has failed to heed calls to relinquish a substantial amount of wealth to repair these historic harms by supporting programs towards economic growth, educational opportunities, and social, economic, and environmental well-being of Black communities.

B. Core Arguments: A Legacy of Harm in the Presbytery of Baltimore

This section highlights individual case studies to illustrate the core arguments of the Rationale. The case studies included here are not exhaustive; they are indicative of patterns of discrimination and bias in how our Presbytery has operated since its inception. In some cases, these examples involve specific churches or individuals. It is not our intent to single out or “call out” these entities; instead, we share these particular stories because they are *representative* of larger trends or commonalities that occurred or are occurring throughout the Presbytery and the country. In some cases, these examples are well understood because the entities in question have independently begun their own initiatives towards truth, reconciliation, and reparative action.

The case studies have been produced by a group of individuals who, while well-intentioned, are not trained historians. The case studies reflect contributions from a number of individuals who participated in interviews or small group discussions, as well as a much wider review of a variety of historical materials, including Synod, Presbytery, and Session minutes, newspapers, and earlier histories.

While we have attempted to contact interested parties mentioned in or related to all of the case studies that follow, in some cases, we received no response and have chosen to nevertheless include those case studies as prepared. The Reparative Justice Working Group takes responsibility for any inaccuracies that may have found their way into this document. Additions, corrections, and other contributions are welcome.

Recognizing the Direct, Historical, and Monetary Benefit from Systemic Racism and Human Trafficking

Although it is often difficult to calculate or estimate the exact economic impact of systemic racism in the modern day, there are historical examples of direct transfers of wealth, the impact of which is still felt today. In the Presbytery of Baltimore, the most notable of these are the financial contributions, totaling more than \$4.4M in modern terms, from the Brown family, whose wealth was unmistakably amassed in their participation in the trade of enslaved people and in the cotton industry it supported.

Alex Brown and Sons (later Brown Brothers) benefited both directly and indirectly from the economy of enslavement through their operations and investments beginning in 1818 and persisting into the 1840s, as a leading exporter of cotton to Liverpool, an active participant in the trafficking of enslaved people across the Atlantic, one of the largest providers of cotton export finance in the U.S. (providing loans to plantation owners), and one of the largest providers of cotton import finance in the U.K. While the Brown family was reportedly aware of the “contradiction in their business activities and their... support of abolition, it was not until the 1840s that their gradual withdrawal from the cotton business began.”⁹

There is no denying that the Presbytery of Baltimore benefitted both directly and indirectly from this accumulation of wealth. Alex Brown served as one of the founders of Second Presbyterian in 1803 and as one of nine elders elected to its first Session in 1811, and George Brown as a trustee of First Presbyterian. In his will, George Brown further canceled a \$25,000 (nearly \$1M in today’s dollars) mortgage to First Presbyterian church, presumably financing the building of the current church at First and Franklin. His widow, Isabella, later donated an additional \$150,000 (more than \$3.4M in today’s dollars) in her husband’s memory to establish Brown Memorial in 1869.

⁹ Brown Brothers Harriman. (accessed 8/22/24). *The Cotton Trade*, paragraph 7. <https://www.bbh.com/us/en/bbh-who-we-are/our-story/200-years-of-partnership/the-cotton-trade.html>

C. Compensating for Historic Underinvestment and Neglect

We often see underinvestment and neglect of Black communities and neighborhoods in terms of harms perpetrated by governments, but the Presbytery of Baltimore is also guilty of these sins. In some cases, as in the direct support for the Board of Missions for Freedmen from 1883 to 1923, the underinvestment is a matter of record, with statistical reports documenting contributions to the congregational level. In others, such as the intangible benefits a church receives when its neighborhood is gentrified, underinvestment and neglect may be more difficult to quantify, but no more difficult to see and understand. Such is also the case for the many predominantly white congregations who, responding to suburban highway policy, and real estate redlining and blockbusting rooted in racial animus and fear, participated in “White flight.”

Presbytery Support for Mission for Freedmen

Following the Civil War, the Old School of the PCUS appointed a committee to set up churches and schools for formerly enslaved people, or ‘freedmen’ as they were then known. This committee became the Committee of Missions for Freedmen in 1870 when the Old School and New School reunified and was later incorporated as the Board of Missions for Freedmen in 1883. The Board focused on building and supporting schools, churches, colleges, and seminaries for Black Presbyterians in the former Confederate states. By 1923, the Board was merged with several others to form the Board of National Missions, which became the Presbyterian Mission Agency (and now the Interim Unified Agency).¹⁰

The historical record is clear on Baltimore’s failure to adequately support the Board of Missions for Freedmen. The written records of the Synod of Baltimore include repeated appeals by the local Standing Committee, highlighting in 1903 the Synod’s failure to consider the work of the Mission: “We too readily forget what two hundred and fifty years of enslavement and enslaving meant to both ‘master and man.’ We lightly, or unduly consider, I am afraid, what has followed these two hundred and fifty years of licensed lust. Of what is now taking place, in many parts of this country, due to its own sowing and reaping, you and I, busy about many things, have not the faintest conception,” and lamenting the underinvestment that that ambivalence engendered: “Let us see what the Synod did during the year ending March, 1902. It gave the Board \$1,862, about 8 cents per member, not quite two street car fares per member, for this work imposed by God. Oh! how heavily this burden rested upon the hearts!”¹¹

During the period of 1883 – 1923, because the Mission for Freedmen was operated as an independent Board, contributions to the Board were separately recorded at the congregation, presbytery, synod, and national level, allowing us the rare ability to *quantify* the Presbytery of Baltimore’s support for this Mission over a 40-year period. This in turn allows us to compare our Presbytery’s support to that of other Presbyteries, as well as our Presbytery’s contributions to this Mission as compared to other Missions.

While support to the Board from the Presbytery of Baltimore was initially consistent with the national average through the 1880s, contributions began to fall in 1888,¹² as compared to denomination-wide support, and

¹⁰ “Guide to the United Presbyterian Church in the USA Board of Missions for Freedmen Records,” Presbyterian Historical Society.

¹¹ “Minutes of the Forty-Ninth Annual Session of the Synod of Baltimore,” Church of the Covenant, Washington, D.C., October 12-14, 2903.

¹² In its 1888 annual report, the Board of Missions for Freedmen proposed creating a \$50,000 permanent endowment to support its work, resulting in \$131,234 in total contributions, the highest single-year amount it had received. There were also reports of direct solicitations by field workers for individual projects, a practice which the Board discouraged. While it is possible that these factors account in part for the decline in contributions from Baltimore at that time, they

never recovered. Over the period from 1883 to 1923, the Presbytery of Baltimore contributed just 6 cents per capita per year, less than half of the national average of 13 cents. This corresponds to **an estimated total shortfall of \$931,000 in 2024 dollars** across that 40-year period. This observation stands in stark contrast with the fact that the Presbytery of Baltimore's overall contributions to the Missions of the national denomination were 25% *higher* than the national average over the same period.

Light Street Presbyterian Church Benefitted from Gentrification in South Baltimore

While the exact effects may be difficult to quantify, it is important to also consider the extent to which the Presbytery of Baltimore and its churches and congregations have benefitted from the long history of racist housing and zoning policies of Baltimore city, the birthplace of redlining. As a specific example, we can consider the case of the effects of these policies in South Baltimore, where the culmination of decades of inequitable housing policies may have indirectly benefitted Light Street Presbyterian Church in Federal Hill.

From 1928 to 1977, 83.2% of families living in the majority-White neighborhood of Locust Point occupied the same property for at least 20 years, while in majority-Black Sharp-Leadenhall, that number was just 22.7%. Likewise, the vacancy rate over the same period in Locust Point was just 1.5% vs. 31% in Sharp-Leadenhall. Not a single property in Locust Point remained vacant during the entire 50-year period reviewed, while 17 such properties remained vacant in Sharp-Leadenhall. The city owned many of these properties because black owners couldn't pay property taxes that were disproportionately higher than those paid by white owners. The fact that black people living in these neighborhoods had similar educational backgrounds and worked in many of the same blue-collar occupations underscores the disparity.

By the end of the study period, 360 houses in the historical Sharp Leadenhall neighborhood had been bulldozed and more than 3,000 predominately Black residents had been displaced to connect I-95 through Baltimore City to a proposed East-West Expressway in the name of "urban renewal." Eventual rerouting of the highway spared the predominantly white areas of Locust Point and Federal Hill. The damage in Sharp Leadenhall, and other Black neighborhoods, however, had already been done. Under eminent domain laws, homes were demolished, and families were relocated to make way for the future highway. The northern part of the neighborhood was rebranded Inner Harbor West (now Otterbein), with city-owned properties being sold cheaply to developers and new, majority-white homeowners. Black former residents of the neighborhood, unable to secure required loans for rebuilding and remodeling the homes, were excluded and forced out.

The Baltimore Sun later reported,¹³ "The bricks-and-mortar rebirth of South Baltimore undeniably played a part in the spiritual rebirth of Light Street Presbyterian Church." Having been without a pastor for 14 years and facing a decaying 123-year-old building and dwindling congregation, Light Street welcomed David Pollitt, who oversaw its revitalization over the subsequent decades. Rev. Pollitt disagreed with *The Sun's* assessment of city housing policy's (direct) impact on Light Street's rebirth, and indirect impact is impossible to estimate. Nonetheless, Light Street has meaningfully benefitted from this legacy of racial injustice, which is unmistakable.¹⁴

would not have been unique to Baltimore, and we here consider the decline in contributions from Baltimore *as compared to* other Presbyteries.

¹³ "Demographics helped spring rebirth of Light Street Church," *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 26, 11 April 1982.

¹⁴ While Light Street Presbyterian Church has benefitted from the gentrification of South Baltimore, it also has a history of affordable housing efforts, notably the operation of the Light Street Housing Corporation, which leveraged funding from, for example, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and volunteer labor to rehabilitate vacant houses into affordable homes, including in Sharp-Leadenhall.

Babcock Presbyterian Church Participated in White Flight

Babcock Presbyterian Church was founded in 1888 at North and Madison Ave. In 1924, the minister and president of the board of Babcock co-signed a letter to the mayor of Baltimore warning “of the recent invasion by the negro race on Madison Avenue” and that it would “unquestionably, within a short period, destroy both the financial value of said Church properties, and the religious usefulness of said Churches in said communities.”¹⁵ In 1937, the Residential Security Map was created by the Homeowners’ Loan Corporation to graphically reflect the trend of desirability in neighborhoods from a residential viewpoint. The map assessed the area around Babcock with the next to lowest rating, C, as the area was adjacent to an industrial area and a redlined area and was mostly populated by African American renters with a high school education or less. By contrast, census tracts surrounding Loch Raven Avenue were mostly populated by white homeowners with a high school education or higher.

In 1949, Babcock Presbyterian Church sought permission from the Presbytery to move to a new location. Noting that “as the church matured and the congregation grew, many members began to suggest that the church’s mission at North and Madison was nearing completion,” and that “we were unable to further serve the neighborhood,” they arranged with the Presbytery to relocate from their location at North and Madison Ave. to Loch Raven Blvd.¹⁶ Our team sought input and historical perspective from the leadership at Babcock, but they were unwilling to assist with our research and declined to comment.

D. Recognizing Inequities in Management of Church Properties

While the Presbytery of Baltimore has benefitted, both directly and indirectly, from national historic racial injustices from the trafficking of enslaved people to gentrification and white flight, it has also directly perpetrated such inequities within its own institution. These are most clearly seen in racial disparities in its management and transfer of church properties and in its handling of the funds associated with them.

History of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church

Madison Street Church (later Madison Avenue) was the first African American Presbyterian church in Maryland, founded by a White board of trustees from the First, Second, and Franklin Street Presbyterian churches in 1848. Based on the personal notes of its first pastor, Rev. R.C. Galbraith, the church’s congregation was composed of both free and enslaved Black worshippers, and while the church’s importance in serving the spiritual needs of this community in antebellum Maryland is uncontested, the details of its origin story vary, both in tone and in substance, depending on the source.

Nearly fifty years after the founding of Madison Street Church, Rev. Joseph T. Smith, Pastor Emeritus of Central Presbyterian Church, wrote a history of the Baltimore Presbytery.¹⁷ Writing with a clear racial bias, he recalls that, prior to the founding of Madison Street:

Presbyterians had always felt... a profound interest in the large colored population of Baltimore... Christian masters recognized their obligation to provide for the religious instruction of their slaves. Mission schools and Bible classes were established among the colored people in different sections of the city... The names of colored members were found on all our church rolls. They worshipped with the white congregations and were seen in them all seated on back seats or in the gallery.

¹⁵ Scanned images of the letter may be found at <https://theblackbutterflyproject.com/Archives.html>

¹⁶ “A Brief History of Babcock,” 1966.

¹⁷ Joseph T. Smith, *Eighty Years: Embracing a History of Presbyterianism in Baltimore*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1899.

He notes that “Many of the more intelligent among [the colored people] desired a separate organization,” but attributed that desire to them being “in many ways embarrassed, and as they thought, hindered in their efforts at self-improvement by their association with the whites.” He describes the decision to found the church as a determination “to yield to their wishes and organize a colored church under the care of a white pastor,” further noting that, “For obvious reasons Presbyterian services are not so attractive to colored people generally and their pastors have labored diligently to instruct their people and make them intelligent Christians and give to the understanding its rightful control over their emotional nature.”

Contrasting this description, the tradition passed down by members of Madison paints a very different picture. In 1842, enslaved worshippers owned by members of First Presbyterian Church wished to worship in the main building with White members, rather than separately in the Sunday School, but were only allowed to attend in the rear gallery of the church. The issue arose again in 1848, when then enslaved members tried to hold a vote on the matter; denied this right, they walked out in “holy protest” to “affirm that just and fair treatment between sisters and brothers in Christ was within the scope of reasonable expectation,” refusing to worship in a place where they would not be treated as spiritual equals.

Only after this protest, remembered with pride as a demonstration of strength, courage, and resistance, did the board of trustees agree to establish the Madison Street Church. Far from the accommodating tone of Rev. Smith’s history, this alternate understanding of Madison Street’s founding casts the actions of the board of trustees as further attempting to constrain and deny Black Presbyterians’ rights to free worship and self-determination.

In 1928, Madison Street Church, the original location having been selected for the convenience of the slave-owning members of First Presbyterian, moved northward to its present location on Madison Avenue in Druid Heights, to be nearer to the community it served. There, the church supported the education of its members and engaged in charitable community ministry.

Property Transfers Involving Knox and Faith Presbyterian Churches

Founded in 1876 as a mission Sunday School for First Presbyterian, Faith Presbyterian Church was established in 1886 and, in 1895, took possession of the Glendy Burial Ground and the adjacent lot from the Presbytery of Baltimore on which to build a new building. In June 1926, Rev. H. Octavius Graham was invited by the Presbytery to start a church in East Baltimore, which would be the third Black Presbyterian Church in Baltimore. With forty members, Knox Presbyterian Church was admitted to the Presbytery as an organized church on May 20, 1930.

Knox quickly grew to 300 members (meeting in a repurposed saloon) but struggled through the depression, losing a modest building fund due to a bank failure. In 1944, the congregation organized a second building campaign to purchase and renovate a new church at the corner of Ashland and Washington Streets. The congregation was not incorporated, so the property they purchased (with their own money) was owned by the Presbytery.

The 1937 Residential Security Map assessed the area of Gay and Chase Street, where Faith Presbyterian was located, the lowest grade of D, surrounded by industrial parcels and other redlined areas. In 1944, the Presbytery’s Church Extension Committee wanted to form a congregation in the Loch Raven area and suggested that Faith Presbyterian would be the logical choice. Reviewing racial distributions, population trends, and the residential distribution of its membership in the spring of 1945, Faith found that many of its members lived in the suburbs and that the Black population in its neighborhood was steadily increasing. In 1946, they decided to move to the present location at 5400 Loch Raven Blvd., where the church would find itself in a middle-class community, “much as the area around Faith was a generation ago.” Demonstrating

their bias, Faith created a fund to continue ministry with children in the neighborhood after the move, specifying that fund was for “*white children*” only.¹⁸

Faith needed \$90,000 to purchase the property on Loch Raven, but the Presbytery and the National Board of Missions were able to offer grants and loans for only \$65,000. Faith was unwilling to settle and threatened to sell its original property commercially. This would have been difficult, since property use was restricted to a house of worship because of the Glendy Burial Ground. After months of negotiation, Dr. Long of the National Board of Missions suggested the idea of selling the Knox church, giving the proceeds to Faith, and moving the Knox congregation into Faith’s old building, with the hope of creating there “the largest work for colored people in the country.”¹⁹ It is important to note that no one from Knox was present at this meeting when three white institutions decided what should happen to Knox’s property and resources. The National Board of Mission’s plan prevailed: The Presbytery and National Board facilitated Faith’s move through combined grants of \$65,000, plus the proceeds of the eventual sale of Knox’s building (\$26,500): Faith got the \$90,000 they’d hoped to earn from the property sale, and Knox moved into the vacated building.

Knox paid Faith for the old building with a \$25,000 grant from the National Board of Missions and a \$25,000 loan from the Building Aid Fund, while Faith received an additional \$15,000 grant and \$20,000 loan for the purchase of the new property. Contemporary minutes of the Presbytery note that “Then upon motion, the Stated Clerk was advised to defer publicity on the Faith-Knox matter until later.”

In October 1950, the Presbytery allowed Faith to borrow up to \$5,000 from the Challenge Fund, if requested; however, in November 1950, Faith needed an additional \$15,000 to make payments for its new building. As part of the Presbytery response, Knox’s former property at Ashland and Aisquith Street was mortgaged, with Faith assuming all expenses, not to exceed \$25,000; the proceeds of the sale of the Knox property, in 1951 for \$26,500, also went to Faith.

In contrast, when Knox requested \$3,000 from the Presbytery for “imperative need for heating,” it appears that the request was denied; records show that, in September 1952, Knox instead received a commercial loan of \$3,500 for the heating. When Knox took possession of the property, they found it to be in serious disrepair. Accordingly, upkeep of the enormous building proved to be a continual drain, with the balcony having to be closed due to safety concerns and further issues related to the upkeep of the cemetery grounds. When the property was sold, Faith deeded the Glendy Burial Ground to the Trustees of the Presbytery of Baltimore for \$5 and established a small fund for its continued maintenance, money which was not made available to Knox for cemetery upkeep and is still held by the Presbytery trustees today as “the Glendy Fund.”²⁰ Though resources were available specifically for cemetery upkeep, in the mid-1970’s a request for \$4,000 for repairs to the exterior cemetery wall was given only as a loan. Ultimately, Knox relocated again, in 1979, to its present location at Preston and Eden.

Urban Ministry Fund

Arlington Presbyterian Church was organized in 1905 near Pimlico, with the last major additions completed in 1929. By 1968, it was noted that the Black population in that part of the city was growing substantially, and in 1982, the church was closed.

¹⁸ Faith Presbyterian Church Session minutes, May 3, 1949.

¹⁹ Taylor, J. Carey, letter to Robert Gault, 10/25/1948, hard copy in folder stored at Faith with relocation information.

²⁰ The Glendy Fund contains around \$11,000 and is held as part of the Presbytery’s unrestricted endowment, continuing to generate interest income – a percentage of which is contributed to the Presbytery’s budget each year.

Regarding the sale of the property, minutes of the Presbytery note “that the earnings from the sale of the property be utilized for urban [ministry] with the priority consideration being given to the Pimlico area ministries.” However, these and other funds were not explicitly broken out as separate income streams in the Presbytery budget, and this earmark was therefore not honored or, eventually, even remembered.

In 2016, when separate income streams were broken out explicitly again, the Presbytery used the fund to support Presbytery staff salaries.

E. Repairing Broken Trust with Black Presbyterians in Baltimore

Finally, in some cases, while the harm may originally have been of a financial nature, the breach is much deeper, and simple compensation will not be sufficient to mend it. Here, we acknowledge that while movement from apology and confession to the reparative actions proposed herein is a necessary step in achieving reconciliation, it will not be the final step.

New Imani

New Imani was a new church development begun in 2000, and the first for the Presbytery of Baltimore in more than 30 years, whose purpose “was to establish an upwardly mobile African American church in Randallstown.”

At this time the standard approach to new church development defined by the denomination was to fully fund the church for the first five years, then to incrementally decrease its support thereafter, to be supplemented by increased giving from the growing church congregation. The main objective, then, was to establish the new church’s financial solvency. However, the first Pastor, Rev. K. Aaron Lee, found that those interested in joining the congregation were neither upwardly mobile nor highly educated. Instead, this was a community struggling with racism and with economic woes. Rev. Lee asserted, therefore, that the standard approach would not work in this case, that there was a need to train the congregation as disciples first, and that the Presbytery’s financial priorities for new church development should take a back seat to pastoral care.

While the Presbytery initially supported Rev. Lee in his assessment, the costs in terms of both time and money gradually became clear, as the building was riddled with construction and utilities issues. As financial pressures mounted, the Presbytery began to change the rules, introducing new financial goals and imposing new development timelines. Gradually, the Presbytery abandoned Rev. Lee’s model for the church, undermining trust between the congregation and the Presbytery.

On a Sunday morning in August 2005, while preparing for church, Rev. Lee suffered a heart attack and died. Devastated, many blamed the Presbytery for his death. In the wake of this tragedy, the congregation diminished and eventually relocated to a warehouse that was difficult for the congregation to access. In 2012, the new church development was set aside as a goal and New Imani was renamed Living Faith Fellowship under new leadership, CLPs Anita Bishop-Johnson and Donna Lea. They moved again, this time renting space from Northminster Presbyterian Church. Living Faith eventually relocated to Mt. Paran Presbyterian Church further west of Randallstown where the faithful few that remained finally found a home. Living Faith Fellowship has since dissolved and merged with Mt. Paran where Anita Bishop-Johnson and Donna Lea still serve as their pastors.

Living Testimony: Experiences of Black Women Clergy in the Presbytery of Baltimore

Black women clergy offer the following testimony about what they have experienced as church leaders in the Presbytery. Given what we have learned through our research, we believe stories of harm will continue to

emerge. We are grateful for the courage of those who have spoken the truth of their experience thus far; we pray that as these voices are uplifted, that the Presbytery will heed their call for repair:

The plight of ordained African American Clergy Women (AACW) mirrors the current white supremacy and institutional racism in America: both in the world and within the church. Over previous decades, the Presbytery of Baltimore has fostered the environment for the level of racism to continue regarding AACW.

As the major metropolitan city on the East Coast with the largest concentration of African American Presbyterians, one would imagine that social justice efforts would have moved along the needle of disenfranchisement for AACW. Unfortunately, the needle in the world has moved further than the needle of justice in mainline denominations.

According to our count, no more than five AACW have been ordained in The Presbytery of Baltimore. AACW have disproportionately not been afforded leadership positions, nor have they been supported during difficult times between the clergy woman and the congregation. Advocates for justice who see these disparities are empathic to the women but perpetuate the abuse with their silence.

What is needed is a concerted effort to address these atrocities within and outside of the church. There is a need for our stories to be heard, an apology to be offered, and a strategy to support AACW within the Presbytery in various forms to right these wrongs. Strategies could include a partnership with the Synod's Next Generation Initiative targeting AA women toward ordained ministry opportunities in the Presbytery of Baltimore.

Together, through persistent advocacy and unified efforts, meaningful change can be achieved within the Presbytery and beyond. Let's keep pushing for the justice and support AACW rightfully deserve.²¹

IV. Previous Efforts Towards Reparative Justice

We are not the first church institution to propose establishing a concrete course of reparative justice action, and the Working Group has benefitted from studying the lessons learned and rationale used in earlier, similar efforts. While our proposal is not identical to any of the previous efforts discussed here, elements of it can be seen throughout.

A. Efforts of the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has initiated similar efforts in the Baltimore area, both at the Diocese and congregational levels, over the past several years, and have been open to sharing their experiences and recommendations with us.

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, under the leadership of Bishop Eugene Taylor Sutton, the first Bishop of color in the Diocese, established a Reparations Task Force in 2017, beginning a years-long study of their history and the effects of slavery, as well as advocacy and education. With this developed understanding of the legacy of exploitation of African Americans and how it had benefited both the country as a whole and institutions like their own, the Diocese sought to address and repair local, systemic inequalities in education, healthcare, housing, economics, and criminal justice. In the words of Rev. Canon Chris McCloud, "reparations are a means to repair that which has been broken," including monetary compensation, as well as restoration, atonement, and reconciliation. In 2020, their Task Force established a seed fund, sourced from unrestricted

²¹ Rev. Karen Brown with input from the other women clergy in the Presbytery of Baltimore.

resources of the Diocese and contributions from congregations, which has grown to \$1.38M through capital gains and continued support. A distribution committee was established in 2021, and in 2022, the first grants were awarded, with the council encouraged to contribute a minimum of \$100,000 annually. With focuses on education, elder and health care, affordable housing, environmental degradation, and job creation and microeconomic investment, the fund has already disbursed more than \$400,000 in grants in its first 2 years. These grants have supported projects in the arts, cultural heritage, education, job support for the formerly incarcerated, tools for new home ownership, mentoring, and coaching. Other Dioceses, including New York, Long Island, and Virginia, have also set up task forces or commissions to explore similar programs, with the Diocese of New York committing \$1.1M to a fund in 2019.

Memorial Episcopal Church, a 95% White church in a 50% Black neighborhood in Bolton Hill, began their work of repair by asking the question, “Who are we, and why is it this way?” They started with a historical study using public and rectory records, discovering that their church was dedicated to two individuals who enslaved people, including Robert E. Lee’s chaplain, and that early rectors had served in the confederacy. Later, in 1956, the church had explicitly voted against integration. Motivated by these revelations, and despite some resistance within the congregation, the church set a goal in January 2021 of giving out at least \$100,000 per year over 5 years. With \$450,000 in seed money from their endowment supplemented by private donations, comparable to the ask in a capital campaign, their Guy T. Hollyday Justice and Reparations Fund began disbursing funds in 2022. The grants are focused on criminal justice reform, affordable housing, safe drinking water, urban green spaces, local schools, and jobs for Black youth, and the allocated money is managed by Black-led nonprofits and organizations. Individual grants range from \$5,000 - \$15,000 and have no follow-up reporting requirements.

B. Efforts Within the PCUSA

In 2022, the Presbyterian Church (USA) established the Center for Repair of Historic Harms, under the leadership of Rev. Anthony Jermaine Ross-Allam, to recognize, acknowledge, and repair the harm caused by the Denomination and its components to Indigenous, African American, and other marginalized groups. The Center’s stated goal is to grow the number of people engaged in this work. While it does not have reparations fund itself, it has established important guidance for engaging in this kind of effort, for example in distinguishing “reparations” as the act of a nation-state or group of states distinct from the “repair” work of the people, or by highlighting the importance of addressing historic harms, understanding the role the church has played, and acknowledging our complicity and responsibility in both action and inaction.

Specific efforts at the Synod and Presbytery level offer guiding examples. The Synod of Lakes and Prairies, seeing a need to move on from acknowledgements, apologies, and workshops to concrete investment and action, began a Restorative Giving Initiative, now called “Restorative Actions,” which invites giving at the individual, congregation, or mid-council level, with gathered resources allocated for the benefit of Indigenous or African American communities, depending on the fund selected. These funds were seeded in late 2020 by an initial dedication of \$351,000, representing 15% of the accumulated wealth (that is, unrestricted net assets) of the Synod. The money gathered is transferred to an independent legal fiduciary that is directed by trustees who are leaders from the targeted communities; these trustees have full control of the distribution of funds.

The Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery recently paid off a \$718,000 debt that had been incurred in the early 2000s by a Black church in the course of a presbytery-directed building transfer to the benefit of two White churches. The payment represented 13% of the Presbytery’s discretionary resources. The Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, occupying the historical lands of the Niimiipuu people (French

Canadian: Nez Perce), led a listening and reconciliation process that resulted in a formal apology, a new

practice of beginning gatherings with land acknowledgements, and a capital campaign in support of Native American churches with \$50,000 to be raised with a \$50,000 match from Presbytery reserves.

The Princeton Theological Seminary also conducted a historical research project which concluded that 15% of the school's current endowment, or \$147M, could be traced to profits made from investments and donors tied to slavery. They also found ties between founding faculty and other leaders to involvement in the American Colonization Society and the use of the labor of enslaved people. In recognition of these findings, the Seminary set aside \$27M, sourced from the endowment, for scholarships and programs that directly target the descendants of the people that it enslaved or oppressed. These programs include 30 scholarships and 5 doctoral fellowships for direct descendants or students from other underrepresented groups, hiring a professor focused on African American life, funding a full-time director of a new Center for Black Church Studies, and renaming a library after its first African American student.

C. Racial Justice Ministries Across the Presbytery of Baltimore

Many churches in our Presbytery are actively engaged in ministries of racial justice and are on the road towards the work of repair. Congregations engaged in racial justice work include:

Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church, Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church, Catonsville Presbyterian Church, Faith Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, First Presbyterian Church of Annapolis, First Presbyterian Church of Bel Air, First Presbyterian Church of Cumberland, Govans Presbyterian Church, Highland Presbyterian Church, Hunting Ridge Presbyterian Church, Knox Presbyterian Church, Light Street Presbyterian Church, Roland Park Presbyterian Church, and St. John United.

Importantly, one of three core values named in our Presbytery's strategic plan is the promotion of justice. In line with this goal, we are a Matthew 25 Presbytery, a movement within the PCUSA which promotes congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty. There are 18 congregations in the Presbytery who identify as Matthew 25 churches.

D. Other Notable Efforts

Similar to the program described above at the Princeton Theological Seminary, the Virginia Theological Seminary began a program in 2019 with the first payments disbursed in early 2021. Designating \$1.7M from the Seminary's endowment as a Reparations Endowment Fund, the program will fund cash payments in perpetuity to the living descendants of enslaved people who worked on the campus and free Black workers who were subsequently underpaid due to limited employment opportunities. Additional funds were also allocated to support the work of Black congregations with historical ties to the Seminary, fund research and programs that promote justice and inclusion, elevate the work and voices of Black alumni and clergy within the Episcopal church, and support other projects related to racial and social justice.

The Center for Congregational Song has a Reparations Royalty Pilot Program which encourages the "practice of valuing the musical contributions of persons of color to worship music repertoire" by helping congregations establish programs that allocate funds on the basis of using that music in worship services. For example, the United Parish of Brookline, Massachusetts took up a collection every time a Black spiritual was sung over a 10-month period, raising \$12,000 for music programs for Black youth. The Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church of Denver, Colorado sets aside \$500 every time a spiritual is featured in a service, raising approximately \$5,000 per year. Such efforts are illustrative of ways that individual congregations might choose to designate funds to the Presbytery of Baltimore's Reparative Justice Fund beyond the recommended percentage allocations.

V. Proposed Action

The Dismantling Racism Team proposes that the Presbytery of Baltimore establish a Reparative Justice Fund (RJF). Because it is difficult to recommend precise numbers based on historic harms, our recommendation for this reparative action is based on the estimated national financial disparities between the income and wealth of white American households and the income and wealth of households in historically marginalized African American communities.²² This portion of the presbytery's wealth is relinquished as an investment in the work of repair.

The purpose of the RJF is to repair historic harms through investment in the self-development of African American communities. As this fund will consist of wealth relinquished as an investment in the work of repair, disbursements from the fund made to impacted communities are not grants and should therefore have minimal reporting requirements mandated by the presbytery. In staying with the spirit of surrendering wealth, the donors (individuals, congregations, mid-councils, and other organizations) will specify only that the funds be used for the broad purpose of repair as we have defined it. Donors will not have influence over the policies, selection criteria, or other procedures.

The Dismantling Racism Team and the Commission on Reconciliation call on the Presbytery of Baltimore to take the following actions:

1. **The Presbytery of Baltimore allocates 15% of its unrestricted, unencumbered funds and 10% of income from future property sales to the Reparative Justice Fund.** These monies will be added to those already allocated from the legacy of The Center (approximately \$153,000) currently titled *Reparative Actions Fund Reserve*. The final amount to be determined based on 2025 end of year balance and 10% from property sold after that date.

For Information: Based on financial reports of the Presbytery's reserves as of December 31, 2024, the unrestricted and unencumbered holdings were equal to \$8,539,461. Therefore, 15% of this would have been \$ 1,280,919.

2. **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. Members of the new Board would be from the Black community and will comply with all the legal requirements established by the State of Maryland.

²² A Brookings Institution study about the growing racial wealth gap concluded: "In lieu of significant policy changes that impact wealth accumulation and distribution, racial inequality will likely continue to grow. Efforts to close this racial wealth gap include [progressive tax policies](#) in which the average tax burden increases with wealth and income, or [reparations](#) from the private and public sector. In tandem, both will act to ease immediate disparities and put us on a path of reconvergence so that racial wealth equity might be seen in our lifetime."

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

For Information: The Synod of Lakes and Prairies established a Charitable Trust for this purpose. The intent of this action is to create a legally separated fund in which the Board will have sole authority for directing the distribution of funds within the stated purposes of the initiative.

- 3. Direct the Dismantling Racism Team, working with the Commission on Reconciliation, to take the necessary steps to draft Articles of Incorporation, relevant guidelines including the incorporating board composition for authorization by the Presbytery.**

For Information: The work of the DRT will include such tasks as consulting with attorneys, the Maryland Association of Nonprofits and others with relevant experience in establishing a Charitable Trust or similar charitable entity, the drafting of the articles of incorporation, and the nomination of incorporating board members. The Dismantling Racism Team is directed to bring the Articles of Incorporation and supporting documentation to the Presbytery for final approval.

- 4. Direct the Dismantling Racism Team to provide education and outreach to churches and individuals, encouraging them to contribute to the Reparative Justice Fund and support their efforts toward racial justice.**

For Information: We believe the work to repair historic harms is iterative and ongoing. Therefore, we call on individual congregations and the Presbytery of Baltimore to continue this difficult but vital work to recover historical memory, repent of wrongdoing, repair harm done, and seek reconciliation. And we invite congregations and individuals to contribute a portion of their wealth toward this important work of repair.

Members of the Presbytery of Baltimore Dismantling Racism Team as of May 2025:

Rev. Harold (Hal) J. Bennett (Grove)
Rev. TJ Denley (Validated Ministry)
RE Lea Gilmore (Govans)
Rev. Cat Goodrich (Faith)
RE Bobby Hall (Faith)
RE Charese Jordan Moore (Knox), co-chair
Rev. Jose Lopez Chapa (Fallston)
Rev. Jessie Lowry (Christ Our Anchor)
Rev. Ray Meute, Jr. (Highland)
RE Guy Moody (St. John United), co-chair
RE Susan Krehbiel (Presbytery Staff)