

August 19, 2007

## Continuing to combat racism and oppression; working towards reconciliation

By Daphne Mack

On the eve of observing August 23 as International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, the Episcopal Church continues to address its role in slavery and heads towards reconciliation.

“The significance of the abolition of slavery bill is that we really do have to own up to our part, in keeping as one speaker called it ‘that heinous institution’ alive and well,” said the Rev. Jayne Oasin, social justice officer for the Episcopal Church. “So we [the church] need to be one of the major voices that say it was wrong that we ever supported this [slavery], and that we apologize.”

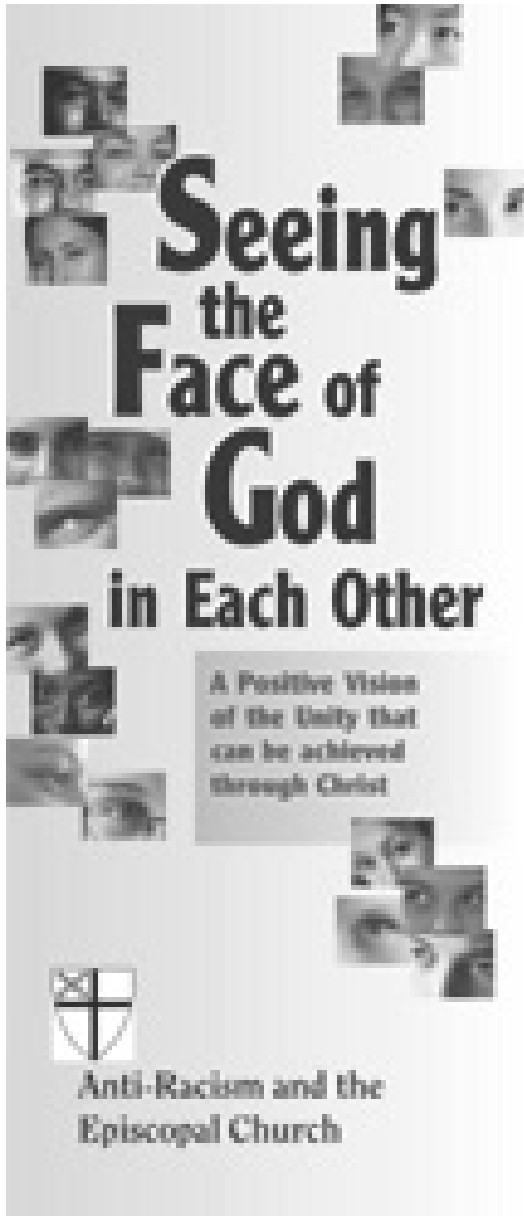
Resolution A123, “Slavery and Racial Reconciliation” which passed at the 2003 General Convention, declared “unequivocally, that the institution of slavery in the United States and anywhere else in the world” is a sin. Oasin said Resolution A123 called on the church to acknowledge its history and participation in this sin.

Through the resolution, Executive Council initiated a comprehensive program urging every diocese to collect information about the complicity of the church towards the

institution of slavery in its communities, including the economic benefits the church derived. The resolution also called on the Presiding Bishop to name a Day of Repentance at Washington National Cathedral; dioceses would be asked to hold similar services.

At present the dioceses of Maryland, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania and Newark have completed their studies which will be available in September on the Peace and Justice website as examples for other dioceses to begin similar work. Oasin also said that Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori will be calling for a Day of Repentance in 2008.

Oasin recommended that August 23 be a catalyst to an entire week or liturgical season dedicated to liturgical expressions of repentance and rededication for adults and children. She added that anti-racism training would be an “appropriate place” to begin.



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To date, some 30 dioceses have participated in the anti-racism trainings which aim to help participants understand the basic issues of prejudice, stereotyping, scapegoat, discrimination, racism and “institutional white privilege.”

These trainings, Oasin said, are not gatherings for “shame or blame” but for dialogue.

Oasin said that the Episcopal Church’s current nine-year initiative for anti-racism expires in 2009. Her prayer is that the commitment last forever because “no form of oppression should have a time limit on it.”

**For more information visit: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice.htm>.**

*Daphne Mack is a communications specialist for the Episcopal Church.*

## Remembering the slave trade and its abolishment

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has designated August 23 as International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition.

This date was chosen as a reminder that slaves were the principal agents of their own liberation when they caused an uprising from August 22-23, 1791, in Santo Domingo (today’s Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which played a crucial role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

The transatlantic slave trade was the trade of African slaves by Europeans that occurred in and around the Atlantic Ocean. It lasted from the 15-19th century. Most slaves were shipped from West Africa and Central Africa and taken to the New World. Some slaves were captured through raids and kidnapping, although most were obtained through coastal trading. Most contemporary historians estimate that between 9.4 and 12 million Africans arrived in the New World, although the number of people taken from their homestead is considerably higher. Some estimates cited numbers as high as 25 to 40 million. Slaves were one element of a three-part economic cycle—the Triangular Trade and its Middle Passage—which ultimately involved four continents, four centuries and millions of people.

The International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition is intended to inscribe the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade in the memory of all peoples.



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Resources

- Episcopal Church Social Justice Ministries  
<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice.htm>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- Why, as Christians, We Must Oppose Racism by Archbishop Desmond Tutu  
[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice\\_40860\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm?menu=undefined](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice_40860_ENG_HTML.htm?menu=undefined)