

BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY: WHERE YOU ARE

A Resource for Individuals and Ministries Seeking
Racial Justice, Healing, Reckoning, and Reconciliation





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www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation

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We understand Beloved Community to be the community that loves as God intends...

*where we speak truth and dismantle hierarchies of human value,
where we seek right relationship with one another and creation,
where each person and culture honors and protects all others
as equally beloved parts of the human family of God,
and where we counter human selfishness—
the true root of sin and racism—with the selfless love of Jesus.*

The idea of the “Beloved Community” originated with the American philosopher Josiah Royce in the late nineteenth century. Royce imagined a community rooted in compassion and moral responsibility across differences, a community that would become beloved to its committed and loyal members. Influenced by Royce’s philosophy, Christian theology, Gandhian nonviolence, and democratic ideals, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. later expanded this concept into a vision for society where poverty, violence, and injustice are overcome through reconciliation, nonviolent resistance, and radical love.

This relates closely to the work of Verna Dozier, an influential Episcopal lay theologian of the late twentieth century. Dozier used the phrase “the dream of God” to describe God’s hope and intention for humanity. Drawing deeply from scripture and the prophetic tradition, Dozier argued that Christianity is not about personal salvation alone, but about participating actively in God’s ongoing dream for human flourishing and liberation. Her work emphasized the responsibility of ordinary believers to read the Bible thoughtfully, challenge systems of oppression, and help build communities rooted in love and equality. When we speak of “Becoming Beloved Community,” in the Episcopal Church, we are referring to a framework that guides us towards this vision.

Because this is lifelong spiritual formation fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit, we urge you to allow Becoming Beloved Community to shape your whole life. It may be helpful to imagine a labyrinth as you act, reflect, and pray. On the road toward reconciliation and healing, we travel around corners, make sharp turns, pass fellow travelers, and return to places we have visited before, each time discovering a fresh revelation or challenge. Upon arriving at the center, we discover we are never truly finished, so we turn and walk the path again.

In our experience, the path toward justice, healing, and Beloved Community encompasses four interrelated areas of engagement and commitment that parallel our baptismal promises. On the following pages, notice the synergy between these commitments and the baptismal covenant. Rooted in these promises, we are called to take up the work of the loving, liberating, and life-giving way of Jesus. You will also find suggestions for next steps on your journey—offered not as a checklist to be “completed,” but as ideas to guide you along the way.

QUADRANT 1: Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race

Baptismal Promise: We will persevere in resisting evil, and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

Labyrinth Reflection: Whose culture and stories shape our common life, leadership, and worship? How has our church excluded or embraced the presence, stories, and power of different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups over time?

A NEXT STEP: Racial Justice Audits

Reflect on the Racial Justice Audit of Episcopal Leadership. How do the audit's findings—and the experiences and patterns it reveals—apply to your context and leadership bodies? Conduct an audit of your church or organization using this adapted audit handout or the congregational inventory tool from the UCC

A NEXT STEP: Truth-telling about Church Participation in Racial Injustice

What is your church's history of participation in behaviors and structures of racial injustice? How has your church participated in racial justice and healing? Interview elders and research church and diocesan documents, newspaper accounts, city records, and other local sources. Resources for learning more:

- Uncovering Parish Histories project from the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island and especially the "First Steps" guide
- Old Donation Episcopal Church (Virginia Beach, Va.), Truth-Telling Project
- Memorial Episcopal Church (Baltimore, Md.), Repentance and Reconciliation
- Anglican Church of Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Process
- Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, A Season of Truth and Healing (look especially at the congregational guide, which provides concrete guidance for churches looking to begin congregational history research)
- Episcopal Indigenous Ministries, Native Voices video series

A NEXT STEP: Demographic Comparison of Your Church and Neighbors

Compare your church's racial, ethnic, and cultural makeup with the demographics of the surrounding community using the General Convention Office's neighborhood mapping resources. Notice differences between the racial and ethnic makeup of your church, its leadership, and the wider community. With which diverse neighbors might God be calling you into action and relationship? What historical or systemic barriers need to be addressed?

QUADRANT 2: Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community

Baptismal Promise: We will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

Labyrinth Reflection: What does Beloved Community look like for you and your neighbors? How might you preach, pray, and engage in public witness around Beloved Community? How might that vision shape your worship and prayer?

A NEXT STEP: Transform the Prayer, Worship, and Preaching Within Your Church

True change begins from within. Examine the language, iconography, hymns, leadership, and theological assumptions embedded in your liturgy and worship space. How might your prayer, worship, and preaching proclaim God's dream of right relationship and reflect the full diversity of God's beloved children?

- Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music's Resources for Racial Reconciliation and Justice
- "Prophetic Voices: Preaching and Teaching Beloved Community" podcast
- "Proclamation and Prayer" Resources
- Seminary of the Southwest, Liturgy of Remembrance and Truth-telling
- St. Ambrose Episcopal Church (Raleigh, N.C.), Dismantling White Supremacy in Worship
- "Preaching Black Lives (Matter)," (2020), Gayle Fisher Stewart

A NEXT STEP: Transform Your Church's Public Witness

Engage in witness alongside the broader community. With which neighboring faith communities, local leaders, and justice or civic groups might you partner as you study the racial history of your area? What truths about the past and present are being shared by people of color in your communities? How might you lift up these truths through your public witness?

Examples of Episcopal public witness and reckoning efforts:

- St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Richmond, Va.), Visible History Initiative
- Washington National Cathedral, Now and Forever Windows
- Calvary Episcopal Church (Memphis, Tenn.), Service of Remembrance and Reconciliation

QUADRANT 3: Practicing Jesus' Way of Healing Love

Baptismal Promise: We will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Labyrinth Reflection: How will we grow as reconcilers, healers, and bearers of justice? What activities, practices, and experiences will form and transform us? How will we share stories, grow relationships, and seek Christ in one another and in our neighbors?

A NEXT STEP: Engage with Dismantling Racism/Anti-racism Trainings and Programs

Learning about racism and its impact on our lives and structures is lifelong work that must continue alongside concrete action toward racial justice. The Episcopal Church website offers a list of useful programs for Episcopalians (not exhaustive): Anti-racism/Dismantling Racism Training – The Episcopal Church.

A NEXT STEP: Racial Healing and Reconciliation Pilgrimages

Pilgrimage can be a powerful part of the journey toward racial healing. What places in your community or nearby could you visit to deepen your understanding of justice and injustice? What might it mean to visit these places, and whom might you invite to join you? Here are examples of such pilgrimages from across the church:

- Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, Trail of Souls
- Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, Pilgrimages to Lynching Sites
- Episcopal Relief & Development, Ghana Reconciliation Pilgrimage
- Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, Jonathan Daniels and Martyrs Pilgrimage
- Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, Pilgrimage to WWII Concentration Camps
- Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming, Wind River Pilgrimage

A NEXT STEP: Youth Formation for Racial Healing

There are a number of excellent faith-based curricula for engaging youth in conversations about race and faith. Which one might you try out in your Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, youth group, family group, camp, or school setting?

- Racial Justice Lesson Plans for Youth and Young Adults by Miriam McKinney in partnership with The Episcopal Church
- Dismantling Racism Youth Curriculum from the Absalom Jones Center
- Living God's Dream from the Absalom Jones Center
- Sowing Seeds in the Sand, a story-based program for people of all ages

A NEXT STEP: Learning Circles

Host a reading or viewing group at your church—and invite non-churchgoers—to reflect together. Some resources:

- Peter Jarrett-Schell, “Reparations: A Plan for the Church”
- Kelly Brown Douglas, “Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God”
- Catherine Meeks, “The Night Is Long but Light Comes in the Morning”
- Stephanie Spellers, “The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline and New Hope for Beloved Community”
- Jim Wallis, “America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege and the Bridge to a New America”

QUADRANT 4: Repairing the Breach in Society and Institutions

Baptismal Promise: We will strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

Labyrinth Reflection: What institutions and systems most clearly bear the signs of racial injustice? How will we participate in the repair, restoration, and healing of people, institutions, and systems?

A NEXT STEP: Connect with Local Partners

Spend time learning about the specific issues of racial justice in your community. What organizations, leaders, coalitions, and congregations are addressing these challenges? How might you offer your time, talent, and treasure to support efforts already underway?

Here are some examples:

- Memorial Episcopal Church (Baltimore, Md.), Guy Hollyday Justice and Reparations Initiative
- Diocese of Western Massachusetts, Atonement Resolution and endowment distribution
- Diocese of Wyoming, Return of Indigenous cultural items kept for nearly 80 years
- St. John's Episcopal, Roseville, CA and the Neighborhood Wellness Foundation

A NEXT STEP: Connect with Episcopal Programs Working for Justice

- Actively welcome and protect refugees and immigrants alongside Episcopal Migration Ministries
- Engage with the Office of Creation Care through work on eco-justice and environmental racism
- Advocate for more just public policy with The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations
- Participate in The Episcopal Church Office of Racial Reconciliation's educational and capacity-building programming

For additional recommendations and next steps, refer to the report of the Presiding Officers' Working Group on Truth-telling, Reckoning, and Healing (pp. 15-25).