

TRUTH AND REPARATIONS TASK FORCE

Reparative Justice Bible Study Supplemental Guide
for use in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

“Some days it is just hard to accept that racism can still be such a powerful dominating force in all our lives. When I remember all that black and white folks together have sacrificed to challenge and change white supremacy, when I remember the individuals who gave their lives to the cause of racial justice, my heart is deeply saddened that we have not fulfilled their shared dream of ending racism, of creating a new culture, a place for the beloved community. Early on in his work for civil rights, long before his consciousness had been deeply radicalized by resistance to militarism and global Western imperialism, Martin Luther King imagined a beloved community where race would be transcended, forgotten, where no one would see skin color. This dream has not been realized. From its inception it was a flawed vision. The flaw, however, was not the imagining of a beloved community; it was the insistence that such a community could exist only if we erased and forgot racial difference.”

From Killing Rage: Ending Racism (1995) by bell hooks

The Baptismal Covenant

Celebrant:	Do you believe in God the Father?
People:	I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
Celebrant:	Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
People:	I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
Celebrant:	Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?
People:	I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Celebrant:	Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
People:	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant:	Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
People:	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant:	Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
People:	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant:	Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
People:	I will, with God's help.
Celebrant:	Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
People:	I will, with God's help.

We stand at the baptismal font, a place of profound commitment. In the sacred waters, we pledge ourselves to a life of faith, a life that reflects the love and justice of God. The Episcopal Church's Baptismal Covenant, with its simple yet powerful vows, serves as a constant reminder of this calling.

But what does this Baptismal Covenant look like when confronted with the enduring stain of racism in America? This guide delves into this critical question, exploring the powerful connection between our core Christian commitments and the pursuit of racial justice and reparations.

This supplemental guide to the "Reparative Justice Bible Study" developed in partnership with the National Council of Churches, and others, helps us explore how the Baptismal Covenant, far from being a passive statement of belief, is a call to action. In this supplemental guide we explore how the very tenets of our faith compel us to dismantle the structures of racism, white supremacy, and colonialism that continue to plague our nation.

The Episcopal Church, with its long history of wrestling with social justice issues, offers a unique lens through which to view this struggle. The guide invites participants to reflect on the Church's pronouncements on racial justice and its own historical entanglement with these systems of oppression. This guide also invites us to think more inclusively, understanding that while the study advocates for reparations for Black Americans and support of the passage of HR40, our work of Reparatory Justice in the Diocese of Virginia includes all who are of the global majority. This supplemental guide will equip the faithful with concrete ways to translate the Baptismal Covenant into action, advocating for reparations, and working to build a more just and equitable society.

Reparations, both material and symbolic, are not simply political issues; they are theological imperatives. Rooted in the principles of the Baptismal Covenant and the teachings of Jesus, reparations become an act of faith, a tangible expression of God's love for all creation.

Together, we will answer the call to racial justice and reparations by living out our Baptismal vows in a way that truly reflects the Beloved Community.

With Faith,

Truth and Reparations Task Force

WEEK 1:
AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR

"Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?"

- **Reflection:** Recognizing Christ in all persons will lead us to dismantle the structures that lead to racial disparities in healthcare, housing, education, and criminal justice. How do we create opportunities and conditions for true equity and flourishing for communities of color? How does loving our neighbor require going beyond acts of charity to address root causes of racial injustice? What does it look like to dismantle systems that privilege some while harming others based on race?

- **Episcopal Connection:** Connect the root cause of racial injustice to the Episcopal Church's outreach and social ministries. Emphasize the Church's commitment to address these disparities through direct action.

- **Action:** Examine the racial make-up of your community. Where and how are people separated and divided physically? Economically? Educationally? Religiously? Where are the racial barriers? Where do you see privilege for some and not others?

WEEK 2:

OWNING THE ETHIC OF RESTITUTION

"Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?"

- **Reflection:** Racism is a sin that contradicts the love and justice of God. Our baptismal vows demand that we resist this evil, even in the face of our own complicity. What forms of racial injustice have we ignored or enabled, consciously or unconsciously? Where do we need to repent as individuals and as a church? How have we, both individually and as a Church, been complicit in the sins of racism and white supremacy? How can the practice of repentance guide us in acknowledging past and present harms, and inspire a commitment to transformative change through reparatory justice?
- **Episcopal Connection:** Explore the Episcopal Church's historical involvement in slavery and segregation. Acknowledgement and confession are necessary first steps on the journey towards reconciliation and reparations.
- **Action:** Support initiatives for truth-telling and historical accountability within your congregation and the wider Episcopal Church. Examine where repentance involves both apologizing and acting to repair the breach. Have you witnessed repentance for racial injustice in your community or world? What did it look like? What action followed the apology?

WEEK 3:

WHAT IS OWED

"Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"

- **Reflection:** True peace requires dismantling the legacy of racism. Reparations are a necessary step towards justice. What forms of reparations, both material and symbolic, are needed to mend the harm done? How can we, as a church, lead the way? How does our Baptismal Covenant call us to participate in the work of reparations? What specific actions, financial and otherwise, are necessary to address the historical and ongoing harms of slavery, segregation, and racial discrimination?
- **Episcopal Connection:** Examine how the Episcopal Church's resources and endowments might be invested in initiatives that promote racial justice and reparations.
- **Action:** Support congregational and diocesan-level initiatives to explore forms of reparations, from financial contributions to community partnerships and property restitution. Advocate for broader social and governmental policies of reparations.

WEEK 4:
A GODLY SPIRIT

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth... I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

- **Reflection:** Our belief in a God of creation and a universal Church where all are made in the image of God compels us to actively dismantle systems of racial injustice. How can we, in the spirit of the communion of saints and the hope of resurrection, build a world where all bodies are equally valued and protected? How does our belief in the interconnectedness of all creation challenge us to confront the ways systems of racial oppression undermine the sacredness of all humanity? How does our understanding of a universal Church propel us to seek unity across racial and cultural lines?

- **Episcopal Connection:** Consider the Episcopal Church's stance on social justice what are specific resolutions from the General Convention or statements from Episcopal leadership on racial reconciliation that come to mind?

- **Action:** Engage in interfaith or multi-racial community partnerships dedicated to combating racism. Explore the lives and witness of saints from diverse racial and ethnic groups, celebrating their unique contributions to the Church.

WEEK 5:

PUTTING THE GOSPEL IN ACTION: REPARATIONS

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

- **Reflection:** Our baptismal community compels us to engage in this work together. How can we use our worship, fellowship, and study to educate ourselves, pray together, and take collective action for racial justice? How does our participation in these acts of Christian community obligate us to create spaces of true belonging for people of all races and backgrounds? How can we ensure that our communities do not perpetuate patterns of exclusion or marginalization based on race?
- **Episcopal Connection:** Learn about the role of Episcopal congregations and dioceses in supporting communities of color, advocating for change, and fostering open and honest dialogue about race.
- **Action:** Examine how worship practices, traditions, leadership, and decision-making structures within your parish might either perpetuate or dismantle racial hierarchies. Commit to diversifying and making these spaces more inclusive.

WEEK 6:

MORAL IMAGINATION AND BENDING THE ARC TOWARD REPARATIVE JUSTICE

"Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?"

- **Reflection:** Proclaiming the Gospel demands dismantling systems of racial oppression. How can we use our words, resources, and influence to advocate for racial equity? What stories of racial justice throughout history and in our communities can we uplift? What does it mean to proclaim the Gospel of liberation and justice in a world marred by racial oppression? How can we amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized communities and advocate for policies that promote racial equity? How do reparations and the building of Beloved community move us closer toward God's dream?
- **Episcopal Connection:** Highlight examples of Episcopal figures or organizations working for racial justice. Emphasize the Church's call to witness and action in the public sphere.
- **Action:** Seek out and learn from the wisdom of theologians, activists, and leaders of color who challenge racial injustice in light of the Gospel. Use your privilege and platforms to speak out against racism publicly.