

Reparations-Inspired Initiative

Adopted by Assembly Mennonite Church on October 23, 2022

I. Reparations: a succinct summary

The word “reparation” refers to the work of repairing; often in relation to a historical wrong, and often in the form of restitution (returning what was wrongly taken) and restoration (restoring the wronged to wholeness). In the last decade there has been renewed conversation in the U.S. about reparations owed to African-Americans for the legacy of slavery and racial oppression, and to Indigenous Peoples for the legacy of colonialization. A bill in Congress (H.R. 40) would explore a national apology and reparations for all African-Americans. But reparative acts needn’t wait for government action. Faith communities, as agents of repair and healing, are called to address the historic and ongoing harm of White supremacy.¹

II. The heart of the initiative

Based on years of congregational anti-racism education, our growing moral consciousness, and the movement of God’s Spirit, we commit to the following:

1. We will collect monies for reparations-inspired action from our Two-Percent offering.² Twenty (20) percent of the Two-Percent Fund will go to reparations in 2023, with that percentage increasing over time. The goal is that eventually 45 percent of the Two-Percent fund will go to reparations, replacing the “local needs” portion of the Two-Percent Fund.
2. The reparations portion will be administered and disbursed by the Reparations Committee.
 - a. This work shall be done in a manner consistent with our guiding parameters (see below) which includes engagement with Black and Indigenous peoples. The committee will also interact with reparation committees from other local congregations, should such committees exist, seeking ways to work collaboratively.
 - b. The Reparations Committee will inform the congregation where payments have been made, and of ways we might further support those receiving our funds.³

III. Guiding parameters and understandings

- a) Reparations are not charity, a gift, or an act taken to ease our conscience; rather, they are best understood as payment of an actual debt for harm committed (restitution) and answering the Biblical call to love God and neighbor (restoration).
- b) At their best, reparations are a spiritual act that enables transformation and healing for both those who give and for those who receive. White supremacy has robbed all of us of our humanity, and reparative acts are how we get our humanity restored.
- c) Our reparation-inspired funds will go toward restorative and anti-oppression initiatives which address harm caused to African Americans and Indigenous groups as a result of our White supremacist culture and colonialization.
- d) Releasing control, which includes heeding the voices of Black and Indigenous Peoples, is an important part of how White Americans renounce White supremacy, and it should be part of how largely White congregations, such as ours, engage in reparations.

¹ *White supremacy* describes a social, cultural, and political order that disproportionately and deliberately benefits those deemed to be White. It was original to the founding of America, pervasive across its institutions, and enduring throughout its history. It is best understood as a massive, multigenerational project of theft – theft of power, of culture, of wealth, of land, of hope, and of the truth about the lives of people of color [Kwon & Thompson, “Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair” (Brazos Press, 2021)]

² On the first Sunday of every month, participants are invited to contribute to our 2 % offering. We are encouraged to give 2 % of our income to be disbursed to impoverished people locally and in the 2/3rds world. We do this as an act of restitution for injustices in economic distribution.

³ We want to be open to but not require ongoing relationships with groups who receive our funds (e.g. invitations to speak with honorarium if they want to, invitation to let us know of other actions we might take to support their work).

- e) Reparative work is fundamentally local. Our focus will be Goshen, Elkhart County and the Michiana region.
- f) White Americans have ongoing work to do learning about the historic and ongoing damage of White supremacy, speaking the truth of what they learn, cleansing their community of the damage White supremacy has wrought, and standing in solidarity with People of Color against racism.

IV. Reparations relationship to the Assembly Two-Percent Fund

For decades, Assembly's "Two-Percent Fund" has embodied the congregation's historic commitment to restititional giving. It is separate from the general budget; and it includes a monthly ritual in worship where members pay restitution (two percent of their income, above and beyond their tithe) in response to living in a country made wealthy through the exploitation of others. Over time the Two-Percent Fund also became the congregation's main vehicle for contributing to organizations addressing human need.

This reparations-inspired initiative seeks to reclaim and refocus the restititional spirit of the Two-Percent Fund. The initiative will have both a familiar feel (we continue to utilize the Two-Percent offering for paying on this debt) and it will be different in significant ways.

- It is a new congregational commitment to proactively address the legacy of White supremacy.
- It is a commitment we make publicly, highlighting the imperative to address White supremacy to others.
- It is a commitment to which we invite other congregations in our area to join, thereby building a larger movement of dismantling the culture and legacy of White supremacy.

V. Additional actions

The task of resisting oppression and repairing harm must take many forms including a) ongoing education about the roots and current expressions of racism, b) relationship-building with people across racial lines, and c) joining advocacy networks to change racist policies embedded in housing, education, health care, voting, and financial systems.⁴ Our work of repair is best done alongside acts of solidarity.⁵ Forming a *Solidarity Ministry Team* to guide the congregation in this could be one helpful way to ensure we not only pay up, but show up too.

Edited for clarity – 12/8/22

⁴ One important advocacy effort is for a national reparations policy (H.R. 40) that acknowledges the grievous harm to African Americans since the formation of this nation and establishes a financial system to assist those harmed.

⁵ Solidarity is "a conscious change in position, where those who are not threatened with oppression step across a line – from the sidelines to sharing the fate of the oppressed. When those who benefit from structural violence find they cannot tolerate the injustice any longer and join with those harmed by the systems of death, solidarity is the result." Sarah Augustine, *The Land is Not Empty* (Herald Press 2021), p. 169.