



ST. PAUL'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Reconciliation Sunday at St. Paul's

September 27, 2020

We are part of a living and evolving history — a journey toward becoming a beloved community. This service of remembrance and repentance is but a step along that journey. Today, we are working on the story we tell about ourselves; we are remembering the forgotten so that we can take the important step of telling the truth. We will need other moments of liturgy and ritual; and we will need to labor on, within our walls and with our neighbors throughout this city.

What Is Reconciliation Sunday?

Reconciliation Sunday is the culmination of a four-year process at St. Paul's, beginning in 2016 and resulting today in this special service of remembrance and repentance.

After the horrific shootings in Charleston in June 2015 and the Episcopal Church resolution regarding the Confederate battle flag, St. Paul's began a conversation about race and reconciliation in our church. After a series of Prayerful Conversations in August 2015, the Vestry passed a resolution in November 2015 calling for St. Paul's to take steps to reconcile its history with slavery, the Civil War, and racism.

The Confederate symbols and flags were removed from the church, and we began to focus on the role of slavery and race relations within the history of the church. The journey promised to be one of discovery, acknowledgement, reconciliation, and healing, with a legacy for future generations of the people of St. Paul's.

The History and Reconciliation Initiative

Following the Prayerful Conversations in 2015, the Vestry set up the History Reconciliation Initiative (HRI) to understand the past role of race, slavery, and segregation in the history of our church. The Steering Committee was led by Linda Armstrong, with subcommittees for History, Liturgy/Music, and Memorials.

HRI Mission Statement: *In light of our Christian faith we will trace and acknowledge the racial history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in order to repair, restore and seek reconciliation with God, each other, and the broader community.*

Working groups began to research the history of St. Paul's and its congregants as it relates to race, and to consider memorials, music, and liturgy. Over time, many more Prayerful Conversations were offered, on topics such as researching history, reconciliation, and the plaques in the sanctuary. These conversations provided a time to share, listen, and pray together as an act of community discernment.

In March 2018, we presented *Bending Toward Truth*, a forum featuring The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and panels of clergy, historians, justice activists, and St. Paul's parishioners to more than 500 participants.

Footage from *Bending Toward Truth*:

- [History and Reflections](#), featuring Drs. Christopher Graham; Elizabeth O'Leary; Nicole Myers Turner; Ed Ayers, and Dr. Rev. Corey B. Walker
- [The Rev. Ben Campbell speaks](#)
- [Bending Toward Truth: Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's Address](#)
- [Panel Discussion](#) feat. Rob Corcoran, Christy Coleman, and Mark Constantine
- [A Sermon Given at St. Paul's By Presiding Bishop Curry](#)

“A Call to Community: Honest Conversations on Racial Healing and Equity,” a series of four Prayerful Conversations, brought forty-five people together in February of 2019, and a pilgrimage in October 2019 took thirty-three St. Paul's people and others to civil rights sites in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama.

In February 2020, St. Paul's published *Blind Spots: Race and Identity in a Southern Church*, the report by historian and HRI Steering Committee member Christopher A. Graham about the

history of St. Paul's as it concerns race, racism, and segregation. Additionally, reports on St. Paul's memorials by Beth O'Leary and church plaques by Anne Hayes were prepared.

Lost Cause-Era Plaques

In June 2020, with the surge in the Black Lives Matter movement, Bishop Goff sent a message reminding the Church that "symbols are powerful." In recognition of St. Paul's extensive history of discussions on this topic together with reports, recommendations, and the previous vote by the Vestry to remove Lost Cause-era plaques, HRI co-chairs Barbara Holley and Matt Stehle presented a proposal to the Vestry for the removal of those plaques and to rededicate the stained glass windows installed as memorials to Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis. The proposal was grounded in history, extensive research, and recommendations made by HRI committees over the last four years. The plaques were removed, and the Vestry approved rededication of the windows.

The Lee and Davis Windows

In 1889, following the death of Jefferson Davis, St. Paul's Vestry passed a resolution to install memorial windows to Davis and to Robert E. Lee. Both windows picture Biblical scenes. Despite popular perception, occasionally and mistakenly affirmed by this church, the documentary evidence from the commissioning and unveiling of these windows prove that these scenes do not portray Davis as Paul, or Lee as Moses.

The windows do tell stories about Paul and Moses that roughly parallel events in the lives of Lee and Davis. The windows were meant to honor qualities about Lee and Davis that St. Paul's people admired in the 1890s. Those qualities fit into the larger Lost Cause narrative that justified the Confederate experience, the slave regime of the antebellum decades, and the then-ongoing segregationist agenda of elite white Virginians.

St. Paul's has transformed since that time and the windows have ceased to be a part of the life of this church.

In 2018, HRI proposed to rededicate the windows believing our identity as Christians in the cause of justice should be reflected in our physical spaces as well as in our actions.

Rededicating the windows is a commitment to continuing to address issues of race and inequality both within our church walls and in our Richmond community. We state that we can recognize and correct the falsehood of the past story-telling, and that we can repair

ourselves by telling the truth about our history as we align our new stories with our new aspirations, grounded in God’s desire for the liberation and flourishing of all people.

Honoring the Work of the HRI Committees

Many, many dedicated parishioners took part in the important work of the History and Reconciliation Initiative, from researching St. Paul’s history, to organizing prayerful conversations, to writing prayers and liturgies, and so much more. We wish to thank all of them — all of you — for helping to shine the light on our blind spots.

Rev. Wallace Adams-Riley
Pat Archer
Linda Armstrong
Mary Arzt
Mary Hunter Ayer
Tim Baird
Sue Bland
Lynn Blankman
Peter Blankman
Rev. Molly Bosscher
Phillip Brooks
Trudy Bryan
Nancy Burns
Rev. Ben Campbell
Laura Carr
Rob Corcoran
Nick Courtney
Rev. Gwynn Crichton
Rev. Rainey Dankel
Ed Dickson
May Dickson

Rev. Charlie Dupree
Rev. Sue Eaves
Cynthia Ellis
Miriam Farris
Anne Freeman
Mark Gordon
Christopher Graham
Gene Harris
Karen Harris
Anne Hayes
John Hoke
Barbara Holley
Victoria Howell
Sam Jackson
Pam James
Adrienne Jules
Rev. Fletcher Lowe
Adrian Luxmoore
Anthony Martin
Rev. Melanie Mullen
Jane Nelson

Katya Nemec
Elizabeth O’Leary
Carol Parke
Hunter Pechin
Maritza Pechin
Mary Ann Ready
Christopher Reynolds
Janet Schwarz
Susie Scott
Anne Snyder
Matt Stehle
Don Switz
Lee Switz
Geoff Switz
Jeff Turner
Joyce VanDerLaan Smith
Michelle Walker
Roger Whitfield
Davis Wrinkle

...and so many others.

What's Next?

The Community Engagement Committee, along with the HRI Steering Committee, is discerning the next steps in this important work. It is abundantly clear from the Community Engagement congregational survey that racial justice is an important topic to all at St. Paul's. As the discernment process moves to completion, here is how we can continue the discussion on this vital issue into the fall.

- ❖ **SPECIAL Fall Book Club on Tuesday, September 22, 7:00 p.m. to discuss *Richmond's Unhealed History* by The Rev. Dr. Ben Campbell.**

Discussion with author facilitated by Rev. Gwynn Crichton. More info stpaulsrva.org/events/bookclub.

- ❖ **BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY WITH BLIND SPOTS**, a two-part discussion of *Blind Spots: Race and Identity in a Southern Church* written by Christopher Alan Graham. Hosted by the History and Reconciliation Initiative with discussions facilitated by Lynn Williams and The Rev. Gwynn Crichton.

Grounded in the Episcopal Church's Becoming Beloved Community Initiative, Session One will focus on *Truth-Telling* and Session Two will focus on *Proclaiming the Dream*. Each session will be 2 hours long and on Zoom. RSVP to Lynn Williams at lwilliams@stpaulsrva.org.

Session One | Truth-Telling

Monday, October 5th | 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, October 7th | 12:00 p.m.

Thursday, October 8th | 7:00 p.m.

Friday, October 9th | 10:00 a.m.

Session Two | Proclaiming the Dream

Monday, October 12th | 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, October 14th | 12:00 p.m.

Thursday, October 15th | 7:00 p.m.

Friday, October 16th | 10:00 a.m.

For more information, visit our [HRI Book Study Webpage Here](#).