



And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8

Below follows the preamble to *St. John's Norwood Episcopal Church: A Faith-Driven Response to the Legacy of Slavery and Racism*, the full text of which is available on our website:

The principles underlying this statement—respect for the dignity of every human being, love of neighbor, and our commitment as Christians to work for justice and shalom for all—are universal. We acknowledge that many in our society have suffered great injustice, and we are committed, as we enter our 150th year as a faith community, to respond to all with faithful action.

This document is intended as a living statement of St. John's commitment to respond to the particular history and legacy of chattel slavery in the United States and its impact on our Black siblings. It is intended to be a source of optimism, aspiration and change.

St. John's has historically demonstrated little recognition of the ways that we have directly and indirectly benefited from systemic racism and the ways that we have contributed to its continuation—by what we have done and what we have left undone. We believe that this is morally wrong. With humility and with God's help, we consciously choose a different path. We commit our hearts and resources to actively joining the struggle for racial justice and equity in our parish, our community, and our nation. Our mission is to secure shalom, God's vision of true equity and relational wholeness for all.

In this year of the 150th anniversary of St. John's founding, we will be "Acknowledging Our Past, Embracing Our Future." For more than half a dozen years, our justice ministries have facilitated discussions on race and social justice, educated our parish, featured the important work done by our archivist on our church's racist history, and made timely calls to action through action alerts and chronicling our social justice initiatives. Our outreach and justice ministries have worked with intention to expand into affected communities. All this, and more, leads us to formally state our belief in the sanctity of all human beings, to acknowledge the reality of the injustices caused by systemic racism, and to take action that fosters "justice and peace among all people," as we pledge in our Baptismal Covenant.

*The Vestry of St. John's Norwood
February 2023*

This special edition of the *Do Justice News* celebrates key actions we have taken in our effort to live out our Baptismal Covenant and give life to the promises made in this statement.

The *Do Justice Newsletter* is published by the Social Justice Advocacy Committee (SJAC) of St. John's Episcopal Church, Norwood Parish. If you'd like to join the SJAC, please contact one of the co-chairs: Lisa Raisner (lraisner@gmail.com) or Annelise Hafer (annelisehafer@yahoo.com). All are welcome!

Editorial Board: Rev. Anne Derse, Rob Hartmann and Lisa Raisner

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The Racial Justice and Equity Committee was established by St. John's Vestry in 2023 to build a shared vision of Beloved Community within the parish and our broader community, and to develop an action plan to achieve it including supportive initiatives undertaken by church ministries, staff and members. It seeks to foster a welcoming and inclusive congregation through sustained efforts to undo structures and practices of racism and privilege first within the congregation and also in the broader community.

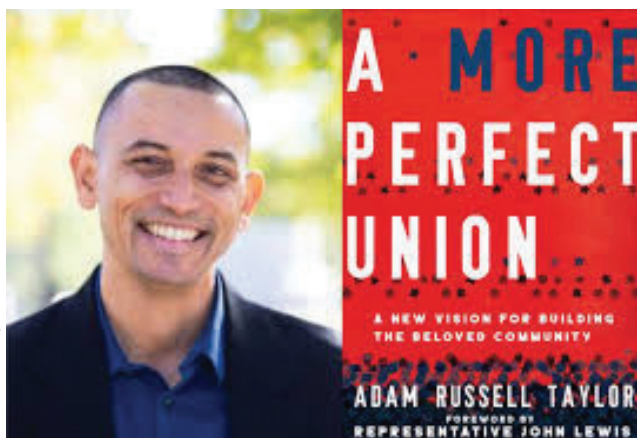
To that end, it fosters dialogue and activities that promote education of the congregation, self-reflection and assessment in all aspects of congregational life. It seeks to create a non-polarizing, honest, inclusive and safe environment for all people to learn and grow. By reflecting on what the beloved community looks like, we hope to become an institution that is intentionally diverse and has a transformative influence in the community consistent with our commitment as Christians to respect the dignity of every person and to love our neighbor as ourselves. All these efforts are organized within the committee's strategic framework that focuses on the broader goals of listening, learning, acknowledging, engaging, and finally taking a stand.

Listen

We facilitate parish and community discussions to listen to our brothers and sisters of color and to each other.

SPOTLIGHT: We held a community town hall on *A New Vision of Becoming Beloved Community* featuring Rev. Dr. Sari Ateek in conversation with Adam Russell Taylor, president of Sojourners and author of *A More Perfect Union*, on Taylor's vision for building Beloved Community. In his book, Taylor describes Beloved Community as "an old story, but...also a new narrative with the potential to inspire and unite Americans across generational, geographic, racial, and religious divides...."

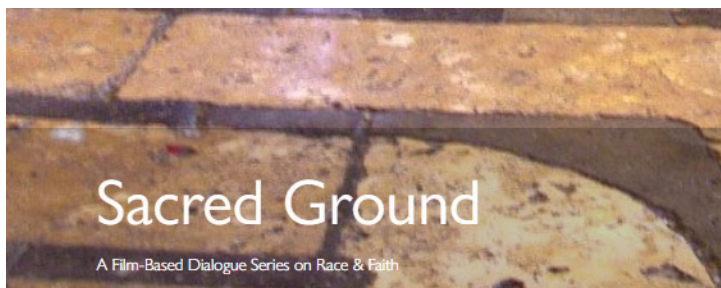
It is a society based on justice, equal opportunity, empathy, and love."



Learn

We sponsor adult forums, town halls and other opportunities to learn more about the pain, inhumanity and struggle caused by racism and white supremacy.

SPOTLIGHT: This year marks five years that St. John's has been hosting Sacred Ground circles, a faith-based tool developed by the Episcopal Church to educate parishioners on the history of race in America through a 12-part film- and readings-based dialogue. We started with a pilot. The next circle included our Rector and the Vestry. And we grew from there to six circles in total to date, with more in the works. We have been blessed with the same insightful facilitator, our now deacon intern Jayne Osgood, who is now training other parishioners to be facilitators.



Acknowledge

We **recognize** our past shortcomings and affirm our future aspirations by publicizing our *A Faith-Driven Response to the Legacy of Slavery and Racism*; our *Land Acknowledgement*; and, other research.

SPOTLIGHT: Our talented archivist, Cathy O'Donnell, opened our hearts and minds by presenting her groundbreaking research on our parish's roots in racism and chattel slavery. She also participated in our diocese's Reparations Task Force that has resulted in a significant commitment on racial justice and equity.



St. John's Attitudes toward Race, An Historical Perspective

Cathy O'Donnell, Archivist

Engage

We **actively engage** on issues of importance to the community we serve.

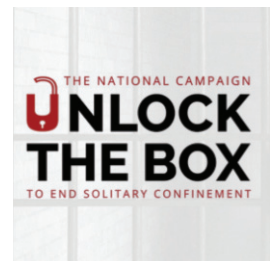
SPOTLIGHT: St. John's Racial Justice and Equity Fund (RJE Fund) was established by the Vestry in 2022 with a \$75,000 initial contribution. The mission of the RJE Fund is to support initiatives dedicated to achieving lasting racial equity and social justice with a focus on dignity and opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. To date, and in accordance with the RJE Fund Investment and Spending Policy Statement, the RJE Fund disburses 10 percent of the fund annually, which is split across the following recipients: Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, Voices for a Second Chance and DC Books to Prisons.



Take a Stand

We **lend our voices** and mobilize our resources to repair the damage caused by centuries of racism and privilege in the United States. We support changes to local, state and Federal policy by advocating in accordance with our faith values and hold community events to educate and change an unjust status quo. We strive to be a model for the faith community and the community at large.

SPOTLIGHT: St. John's is working with Unlock the Box, the national advocacy campaign to end solitary confinement in US prisons, jails, youth facilities and immigration detention centers. In Maryland alone, nearly 39 percent of the prison population was placed in solitary in 2024. Statistics show that this practice disproportionately impacts people of color, both in Maryland and across the country.



2026 Opportunities

The RJE Committee has developed a number of activities designed to promote sustained engagement and keep racial justice issues front of mind, while focusing on impact, collaboration and building connections.

Second Wednesday Salon Series, Advancing Beloved Community in this Moment, from 6-7pm featuring outside speakers on timely topics including: equality, inclusion and diversity in the workplace; the commemorative efforts of the Montgomery County Lynching Memorial Project; current challenges affecting indigenous communities in the Southwest; ongoing local initiatives to foster racial reconciliation; and, an important initiative to preserve the dignity of African American grave sites.

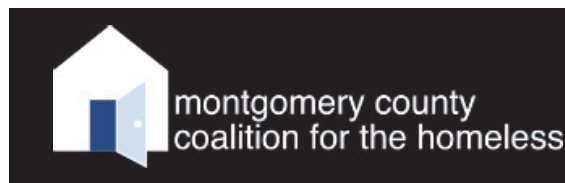
Sacred Ground circles will be offered in 2026 with an updated, revised and expanded curriculum.

Intraministry Collaboration on important initiatives sponsored by the Gun Violence Prevention and the Faith & Democracy ministries, and others, like advocacy days,



Reclaim Our Vote and community town halls. Other important projects the RJE Committee hopes to explore in 2026 include the possibility of hosting a summer Children's Defense Fund Freedom School or a Shepherd's Table Culinary Skills Training Program.

RJE Fund Grants will continue to our key partners: Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, which provides emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing and advocates for systemic change and expanding



the supply of affordable housing; Voices for a Second Chance, a re-entry program that bridges the gap between incarceration and community; and, DC Books to Prisons, which sends more than 7,000 book packages to people incarcerated in over 600 prisons in the United States.

We also offer **direct engagement opportunities** with our fund partners, as well as with Montgomery County's Pre-Release Center and others.



Please join us in any one of these exciting opportunities or join us on the second Wednesday of every month at 6pm to hear more.

All Are Welcome!