



Diocese of Southern Ohio

The Rt. Rev. George Wayne Smith, Provisional Bishop

January 19, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Siblings in Christ,

The very existence of scripture grounds the people of God in what has gone before. Our history set forth in that book tells about the mighty deeds of God and also lays bare the many failings of the people. The Bible tells both the unfailing love of God for the people and God's broken heart, whose anger is like that of a lover scorned. The scriptures call us to remember all that God has done and the loving-kindness shown us, despite it all.

The Bible is unique among the literatures of the ancient Near East, in that it does not just tell about heroes and victories. It also tells about battles lost and moral failings. It tells about sin and, yes, evil. It tells how God loves the people and gives us signs of grace. It shows how knowing all that has gone before, the good and the bad, helps set our face toward a future. The drumbeat at the center of the first Eucharistic Prayer in Rite II marks our rhythm, and it is one set firmly in time, past, present, and future: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

With this in mind, I call upon the seventy-two parishes in the Diocese of Southern Ohio to recollect our history. Knowing our story, and all of it, is after all a very Bible-like thing to do. I call upon us all to learn or relearn our Churches' role especially in the stories of the dispossessed, whom we have engaged or failed to engage at critical moments—and whom at times we have just failed. In the diverse geography of our diocese, we live among the dispossessed everywhere, in the cities, in county-seat towns, in Appalachia. Communities of extreme poverty, Black communities and brown ones—all around are these, God's beloved. And often as not, the dispossessed are among the people of our parishes.

I invite you to know these stories and to recognize in them the pathways toward grace and healing. The Reparations Task Force has encouraged me to make this invitation, knowing that any reparation cannot be reduced to a monetary exchange. Repairing the breach always begins with telling the truth and knowing our past. Discovering or rediscovering this history, and saying it out loud, goes far in repairing the breach. In the Bible's paradigm, it is the only way toward a future. I believe, for example, that we cannot achieve the dream of becoming beloved community if we try to do so without facing into our past.

I ask you to tell the whole story, but keep it concise. The Task Force has decided that twelve hundred words make a good length. If it is twice as long as this letter, then it is about right. Our hope is to have a short account, a chapter if you will, from every parish. We also have a group working on the story of the diocese as a whole. I charge you with writing your parish's story by the end of 2022, and doing the work might make a worthwhile Lenten project this year. Please send your story to our Associate Communication Director, Julie Murray at jmurray@diosohio.org and reference Reparations Story in the subject line. The Task Force, chaired by Diane Ebbs, stands by to lend direction, materials, and a hand in completing your work.

As do I.

Yours,

George Wayne Smith
Bishop Provisional
Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio