

Minute on Reparative Justice and Reconciliation
approved by the Atlanta Friends Meeting (Quakers) 8-15-21
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We believe there is the light of God in each person, and we are connected to God and to each other by this light. We separate ourselves from God and each other by our prejudices which are the root of destructive conflict. We acknowledge our need for forgiveness and grace. We are called to be involved in the work of reconciliation and reparations to the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans.

Reparative justice refers to compensation, which may include a national apology; educational, housing and health care programs; and financial redress from the U.S. government to African Americans to eliminate, to the extent possible, the badges, incidents, and relics of slavery and involuntary servitude which only perpetuate and deepen past injustices and effect society. More specifically, reparations are a system of redress for injustices since 1619.

Reconciliation requires acknowledging and atoning for the wrong done — asking those harmed for forgiveness while resolving never to repeat the wrongs and working to ensure their rights as fellow citizens.

This focus on restorative justice and reconciliation for African Americans in the 21st century calls for us to confront racist aspects of Quaker history as well as continue the work against racial injustice by the Religious Society of Friends. Throughout its existence, the Religious Society of Friends has worked to transform its relationship with African American people as it receives guidance from the Inner Light to work to correct historic wrongs committed by Friends of European descent. With gratitude to the work of Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye¹ and others, we note the following:

Until 1781 Friends in America struggled with the issue of enslavement.² During the 1600s and early 1700s some Friends in the Americas were slaveholders. In Britain, Quakers were involved in the slave trade as ship owners, ship's captains, as investors and as iron-masters made chains and shackles for use in the slave trade.³ But Quakers ultimately became the first organization to end slavery among its members. In 1790, Quakers petitioned the U.S. Congress for the abolition of slavery.

Quakers of African and European descent were pivotal in the Abolitionist Movement and the Underground Railroad network. During that time, Quakers of European descent did not customarily consider African Americans to be their equal, as reflected in segregated seating in meetings and the reluctance to accept African Americans into membership or to socialize with African Americans.¹ Even as late as the 1950s, some Quaker schools and colleges were hesitant to accept African American students.

However, during the 20th century, Quakers worked as allies of African Americans in the civil rights movement through the American Friends Service Committee, Quaker monthly meetings, and the action of many individuals. Bayard Rustin's Quaker/Gandhian principles led him to become both a close adviser of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and one of the two organizers of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963.

At this march, Dr King, in his speech, "I Have a Dream" stated:

“We have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. ... It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds’. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.”

A recent article by the Brookings Institution on reparations noted this statement by Dr King and concluded, “Given the lingering legacy of slavery on the racial wealth gap, the monetary value we know that was placed on enslaved Blacks, the fact that other groups have received reparations and the fact that Blacks were originally awarded reparations only to have them rescinded provide overwhelming evidence that it is time to pay reparations to the descendants of enslaved Blacks.”

The Atlanta Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is called to work for reparative justice to redress the evils of centuries-long oppression and to bring about equity and reconciliation. Atlanta Friends Meeting will engage in reconciliation and healing within our Meeting, communities, and country. Friends of European descent acknowledge and atone for wrongs committed in the past and present against people of African descent. Friends of European descent acknowledge that we are the beneficiaries of slavery and that the enslavement of Africans contributed to the accumulated wealth we have today. Friends of European descent apologize for not acknowledging these truths sooner, and we atone for past and present oppression in the hope of healing justice. The Atlanta Friends Meeting as a whole celebrates our racial diversity and will actively engage with organizations at the local, state, and national level to generate and implement policies for reparative justice.

¹https://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Ministry%20on%20Racism%20conversation%20with%20Vanessa%20and%20Donna_0.pdf

²https://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_1/p_8.html

³<https://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/58/Eliminating-Slavery-amongst-Quakers>