

CMCL Action Fund in Lieu of National Reparations: addressing systemic racism in Lancaster County

October 2022

Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, a congregation that sees all people as belonging to God's Beloved Community*, has embarked on a journey of anti-racism.

Our congregation, composed predominantly of white people, understands it has benefited from white privilege and a legacy of white supremacy and acknowledges a responsibility to help dismantle racial inequities in policing, education, employment, health care and other systems.

One substantial way CMCL can contribute to systemic change is to commit to reparations** focused specifically in the greater Lancaster area.

The Dismantling Racism Committee is making a request to create a CMCL Action Fund in Lieu of National Reparations after a year of congregational reflection that included small group conversations around issues raised by Austin Channing Brown's *I'm Still Here* and by an Anti-Racism Congregational Assessment by Dr. Drew Hart and Dr. Heather Cotignola-Pickens.

The Dismantling Racism Committee believes reparations must be undertaken by the national government. But until the nation acts, individuals and congregations can begin to make a down payment on the debt owed to Black people. This fund is established for that reason. We cannot continue to wait.

While in 1688 Mennonites made one of the first arguments against slavery in North America, further statements by Mennonites against slavery were rare in subsequent years. During the Civil Rights era, a group of Mennonite people of color called on the larger church to recognize that as a religious minority, the church should be in solidarity with racial minorities. A central figure was John Powell, currently a member of Shalom Community Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He encouraged white Mennonites to give \$500,000 a year to a Compassion Fund, which would be designated for reparation purposes. Powell made this call at the national Mennonite Church assembly in 1969, and delegates agreed to respond with a minimum contribution of \$6 per member per year. In the end, Mennonites contributed only \$160,000. (Shalom Community Church website: <https://shalomcc.org/repair/>)

With this awareness and in the spirit of the 1688 anti-slavery statement and the Compassion Fund of 1969, the Dismantling Racism Committee proposes the following:

- CMCL will contribute 10% of its annual budget to the Reparations Action Fund. This will take place in increments: 5% the first year with 1% more each year until 10% is reached.
- Individuals will be invited to contribute directly to the Fund.
- Other houses of worship will be invited to contribute to the Fund.
- A Disbursement Committee comprised of five black leaders from Lancaster County will decide how the funds will be distributed to dismantle inequities impacting people of color across Lancaster County. The Disbursement Committee will develop a mission/vision statement.

Anti-racism is a lifelong journey that must go beyond talk. Many avenues must be pursued to repair damage and stop ongoing harm. The creation of a Reparations Action Fund is an initial action step, and it represents a new beginning as Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster contemplates its own transformation and strives to better embody its ideals.

Members of Dismantling Racism Committee and Reparations Subcommittee, established Oct, 2020:
Laura Boll, John-Michael Cotignola-Pickens, Rev. Susan Gascho-Cooke, Jeff Hawkes, Marty Kelley,
Anika Krebs, Adam Miller, Deb Napolitan, Elizabeth Nissley, Ismail Yoder Salim, Soleil Yoder Salim,
Diane Umble.

* God's Beloved Community is language used by Osheta Moore in Dear White Peacemakers.

**Reparations – The word reparation is frequently used in relation to money given as compensation for an abuse or injury or a type of apology or acknowledgment that something was wrong or unfair.