

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

May 2022 updated July 2023

Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, a congregation that sees all people as belonging to God's Beloved Community,<sup>1</sup> has embarked on a journey of anti-racism.

The 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<sup>2</sup> for Black People with a focus specifically in Lancaster County.

CMCL establishes an Action Fund in Lieu of National Reparations. This comes 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. As a congregation we took a charter bus to DC for the African American Museum of History and had a six-week Christian Education series led by Reverend Naomi Washington-Leapheart which helped our community arrive at a place where real action is close to becoming a reality.

We believe 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. It is in that understanding this fund is established. We cannot continue to wait.

Some history: 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: 1% the first year (2023-24) with a goal of increasing by 1% each following year until 10% (Leviticus 27:30) of the budget is reached. **The budgeted amount will need to be approved during the budget process each year.**
- Individuals will **also** be invited to contribute directly to the Fund through a non-budget account.
- Other congregations and synagogues and mosques will be invited to contribute to the Fund. In addition to financial reparations, support may be offered on any issues/tasks that are appropriate, working side by side with those involved.

- The Dismantling Racism Committee will continue to write a disbursement proposal for the reparation funds which will be brought to the congregation at a later date. The goal is to shift control of the funds from our congregation to a Disbursement Team of African American leaders in Lancaster County. The money will be held in a local financial institution (such as Lancaster County Community Foundation or United Way) after a disbursement proposal is approved. Disbursement procedures will be further developed by the Disbursement Team and shared with the congregation.
- CMCL will send ¼ of the budgeted amount and additional monies in the non-budget fund to the Reparations Action Fund each quarter.
- At the congregational meeting in August or September 2024, highlights of CMCL's first year's experience with the Reparations Action Fund will be reviewed. Assuming all is going smoothly, the Reparations Action Fund plan will next be reevaluated/reapproved three years later (August 2027).

CMCL is acutely and profoundly aware that the Indigenous People are deserving of reparations as well.

CMCL advocates for a separate reparations initiative for indigenous people. During 2023-24, DRC commits to inviting CMCL congregates to join in research of the needs of the local indigenous community. In this research, thought will be given to whether there should be an Indigenous Disbursement Team, whether the action would target Lancaster County or national initiatives.

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 **of addressing "issues of social, economic and ecological justice and challenging oppressive systems in our culture."** (CMCL Core Values 2020-2025).

-----

Members of Dismantling Racism Committee and Reparations Subcommittee (former members are italicized): Laura Boll, *Malinda Clatterbuck*, *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

Members of Church Council: Drew Brubaker, Carol Eby-Good, Calvin Esh, Marian Good, Rev. Leslie Homer-Cattell, John King, Margaret Krumm, Laurel Martin, Ken Nissley, Marlene Reiff, Mike Sharp

1God's Beloved Community is language used by Osheta Moore in Dear White Peacemakers.

2Reparations – 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.