

The Beloved Community Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts

Our mission is: “In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and in keeping with our baptismal covenant, we join with others to **study up, speak up, stand up, and show up** in order to bring the Beloved Community closer to realization in our time and place.”

One of the ways that Episcopalian followers of Jesus can study up and show up is to be aware of efforts and opportunities, locally and nationally, to repair and restore our histories to include the facts and perspectives of those who have not written those histories. This year with the efforts of the National Park Service we had an opportunity to recognize the 400 year history of the presence of Africans in the English colonies on this continent who were enslaved for labor for the next 246 years. On August 25, the Park Service asked churches and other institutions to ring bells to commemorate the arrival of enslaved Africans at Point Comfort, Virginia, near the Jamestown colony in 1619. Bells were rung at 3pm in Sheffield at Christ Trinity. Grace Church, Great Barrington and St. Paul's, Stockbridge, commenced a brief service at 2:45 before ringing the St. Paul's bell for 4 minutes. Front page coverage of this service was provided the following day by the Berkshire Eagle. Bishop Fisher was quoted in the paper, "We are looking back so we can redeem ourselves and move forward."

A local opportunity for another repair of history of African-Americans was given to the South Berkshire County Episcopal Churches who were asked to co-sponsor the 50th Anniversary of the Dedication of the W.E.B. Du Bois Homesite in Great Barrington. Christ Trinity, Sheffield, St. Paul's, Stockbridge, and Grace Church, Great Barrington, have pledged funds to this event, as has the Beloved Community Commission on behalf of the diocese. As of the time of this report, the event on October 18 will include many historians and a framing of the context of the original, bitterly conflicted dedication, which took place at a time in our nation of great racial strife and the Vietnam War and concerns about the spread of communism. The Grace Church choir has been asked to sing in the evening segment.

We spent this year familiarizing ourselves with the Dismantling Racism Framework approved by General Convention. Clergy received “competency level” training at clergy conference, led by Dr. Catherine Meeks of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta. We are currently planning follow-up activities. We also sponsored a diocesan “book-read” of James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Finally, we planned a “Backyard Pilgrimage” in Springfield. Unfortunately, low registration forced us to cancel that event, but we hope to try again in 2020.

Submitted on behalf of the Commission by Lee Cheek and Harvey Hill, co-chairs