

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.”

The BCC continues to work at bringing together people who are interested in working towards Beloved Community. Probably the single most important development in this work over the last few years remains the many Sacred Ground Circles all around the Diocese. Sacred Ground is (now) an eleven-session formation program, with readings and videos, that educate people about our history around issues of race. New Circles continue to form, and past participants are having conversations about next steps. Sacred Ground alumni represent a possible network of interested people around the Diocese, but we have not yet established easy ways for them to connect with each other. That remains a hope.

For the first time this year, we promoted Juneteenth, a new state and federal holiday commemorating the day enslaved people in Texas learned about their freedom. Juneteenth fell on a Sunday, so we distributed resources and encouraged parishes to acknowledge the day in their liturgies, preaching, and/or music. We received positive feedback from many clergy about these resources and how useful they proved.

On the BCC itself, we have begun to focus more on Indigenous People. Last year we joined the Indigenous People’s Justice Network of the New England Province of the ECUSA and a separate but overlapping Indigenous Peoples’ Justice Network of Massachusetts. The most visible result of the MA Network is the celebration of Indigenous People’s Day in Plymouth, scheduled for October 10. Bishop Fisher will be participating this year, and there is talk about having next year’s commemoration in our diocese.

An emerging emphasis is racial reconciliation and repair. We have begun studying these issues and other dioceses’ approaches, and we are inspired by the many race-related pieces of legislation that the 80th General Convention endorsed in the summer of 2022. Our hope going forward is to offer resources to parishes interested in examining their own histories with regard to race, racism, and enslavement. This step would build upon the individual reflections that the Sacred Ground curriculum affords. A diocesan-wide process for coming to terms with our history, including a possible convention resolution in 2023, should follow the parish-level examination of our past and its bearing on the work of our church now.

On the Commission itself, we have expanded our membership and changed leadership. The new co-chairs are the Rev. Nina Pooley and Eric LaForest. We have a Lutheran representative in the Rev. Nathan Piphoo. And we finally have a representative from the Worcester corridor: the Rev. Tim Crellin. Our complete membership is listed below. We are grateful for the engaged leadership of Lee Cheek and Rev. Harvey Hill, our former co-chairs extraordinaire.

Submitted on behalf of the Commission by Rev. Nina Pooley and Eric LaForest

Our Membership:

Ex Officio: Vicki Ix

The Berkshires: Nina Pooley (co-chair); Lee Cheek; Katharine Burnett

Pioneer Valley: Eric LaForest (co-chair); Harvey Hill; Pam Porter; Anna Woofenden; Jahn Hart

Worcester: Tim Crellin

Lutheran Rep: Nathan Piphon