

# Becoming Beloved Community Consultation Final Report

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APRIL 13

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**St. John's Episcopal Church**

**Tallahassee, Florida**

**Chaired by: Marcy Muldrow Sanders & Jim  
Messer**



**St. John's**  
Episcopal Church

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# The Consultation

## Accepting The Episcopal Church's (TEC) Charge

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement, we work to foster Beloved Communities where all people may experience dignity and see themselves and others as beloved children of God. The Becoming Beloved Community Consultation is part of the larger effort of the TEC and the local church community to “do justice.”

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St. John's is already engaged in racial healing and reconciliation efforts with educational offerings, pilgrimages, forums and musical offerings and there is always an opportunity for improvement — to do better, to do more. That is the objective of this Consultation — to identify the areas where St. John's can “do” better.

The consultation met for six months from September 2020 through March 2021. Members of the consultation, which included members from St. Michael and All Angels (SMAA), were:

- Marcy Muldrow Sanders, *Co-chair*
- Jim Messer, *Co-chair*
- Deacon Joe Bakker
- Claire Dodd
- Margaret Edwards (SMAA)
- Mary Frances Foster
- Byron Greene (SMAA)
- Cheryl Haynes
- Susan Jones
- Fr. Dave Killeen
- Alvin Lee
- Fr. Wallace Marsh
- Mtr. Abi Moon
- Meagan Owens
- David Proctor

The four pillars of the Becoming Beloved Community work in the Episcopal Church are steeped in our baptismal covenant. This work challenges us from individuals to dioceses to take an honest inventory of our truth and our work on ourselves, the church, and in the world.

**Telling the Truth about the Church and Race**

**Baptismal Promise:**  
We will persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.

**Core Questions:**  
Who are we? What have we done and left undone, regarding racial justice and healing?

**Church-wide Initiatives:**

- Census of the Church
- Racial Justice Audit of Episcopal Structures and Systems

**Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community**

**Baptismal Promise:**  
We will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

**Core Questions:**  
How can we publicly acknowledge things done and left undone? What does Beloved Community look like? What behaviors and commitments foster healing, reconciliation and justice?

**Church-wide Initiatives:**

- Regional, Public Sacred Listening and Learning Engagements

**Practicing the Way of Love**

**Baptismal Promise:**  
We will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

**Core Questions:**  
How will we grow as reconcilers, healers and justice-bearers? How will we actively grow relationship across dividing walls and seek Christ in the other?

**Church-wide Initiatives:**

- Beloved Community Story-sharing Campaign
- Reconciliation and Justice Pilgrimages
- Multi-lingual Formation and Training
- Liturgical Resources for Healing, Reconciliation and Justice

**Repairing the Breach in Society and Institutions**

**Baptismal Promise:**  
We will strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

**Core Questions:**  
What institutions and systems are broken? How will we participate in the repair, restoration and healing of people, institutions and systems?

**Church-wide Initiatives:**

- Criminal Justice Reform
- Re-Entry Collaboratives with Formerly Incarcerated People Returning to Community
- Partnership with Episcopal Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Immigration and Refugee Reform and Advocacy (as of 8/2017)

## Inner Work – Telling the Truth

Telling the truth asks us to examine: Who are we as persons and as the church; What things have we done and left undone regarding racial justice and healing?

In addition to TEC’s resources, the consultation began the journey along the labyrinth beginning with truth telling. We used the book, *Living into God’s Dream: Dismantling Racism in America*, edited by Catherine Meeks of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing. This work challenged members of the consultation as truth-telling about ourselves, our past, and any part we may have played in the pain of others is difficult. We found this deep inner work to be edifying on many levels.

As part of the consultation’s outreach to inform the parish about our work we presented to the parish at two events, a Wednesday evening forum, and a Coffee Talk.

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Additionally, the consultation offered three opportunities to discuss the book. It was not lost on the consultation that these events were not as well attended as other offerings at St. John's. It is understood that this work is often confusing, troubling, uncomfortable, and difficult. That is why it is important to create safe spaces and opportunities for members to discuss issues of social justice, racial healing, and reconciliation.

***Reconciliation is the spiritual practice of seeking loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God and one another, and striving to heal and transform injustice and brokenness in ourselves, our communities, institutions, and society.***

***~ Presiding Bishop Michael Curry***

## Proclaiming the Dream

Proclaiming the Dream asks how can we publicly acknowledge things done and left undone? What does Beloved Community look like in this place? What behaviors and commitments will foster reconciliation, justice, and healing?

In answering these questions, the consultation needed to answer what is St. John's already doing that fosters reconciliation, justice, and healing? To answer this question members of the consultation asked members of the parish the following questions:

**What is St. John's already doing right?**

**What can we do better?**

**Who can help us do better?**

Thirty-five members of the parish, in addition to consultation members, were interviewed. Some of the ministries and activities parish members identified that St. John's is already engaged in are:

- Having Conversations about social justice
- The Becoming Beloved Community Consultation
- Do Justice Committee
- Participation in the Capital Area Justice Ministry (CAJM)
- Work with Grace Mission and the Kearney Center

- Work on the Remembrance Project
- Including People from St. Michael and All Angels on the BBC Consultation
- Youth Pilgrimage- February 2019
- Adult Pilgrimage- July 2019
- Black Voices Matter- offered on Tuesday nights in Fall 2020
- Howard Thurman Music and Meditation- November 2020
- Support of FAMU Campus Ministry through Common Ministry Budget for 2019, 2020
- Civil Rights in TLH Forums (Laurye Messer Coordinated this Panel discussion in 2017?)
- Club 45 Local Civil Rights Walks in January 2020 and February 2021
- Living into God's Dream- Parish Book Study
- Founding members of Capital Area Justice Ministry
- Founding leaders in Community Remembrance Project
- Riley Elementary School Mentorship

Parish members responses to the remaining questions ranged from "I don't know," to specific projects that parishioners thought we should engage in. In an effort to make a thoughtful informed recommendation to the Vestry, consultation members worked in small groups to evaluate existing ministries and make recommendations for new ministries, activities, and engagements. This culminated in a pitch night where each small group presented their proposals. Here are those proposals

### **Recommendations to the vestry for St. John's continuing work in Becoming Beloved Community work are:**

- **Continue Becoming Beloved Community** – One of the reoccurring themes from our reading is that racial reconciliation work and healing is never finished. We believe this consultation group is doing good work and member leaders will be necessary for our church to bring our vestry recommendation to life. Current members can be given the flexibility to be involved at any level moving forward. This group can also consider adding new members if needed. The continuation of this committee ensures implementation of the Becoming Beloved Community plan adopted by the vestry and assist with integration among committees and commissions in the adoption of this work.
- **Enhancement Proposal: Riley Elementary School** – We propose enhancing our involvement by: Creating and sponsoring summer programs; Helping kids learn from home (internet, laptops, tablets, etc.); Sponsor and support field trips (festival of lights, civil rights walk then lunch at church, Riley House, top of capitol (when open), trip to The Grove, etc.).

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- **Outreach Enhancement** – The St. John’s has done a good job with outreach into the community and there are opportunities to expand the church's outreach and build stronger relationships among the Episcopal parishes and the broader community. Examples include: Continue outreach at Grace Mission, Kearney Center; Capital Area Justice Ministry; Continue pilgrimages; expand opportunities; More St. John’s|St. Michael and All Angels events- Joint adult education opportunities; South City Program; More sermons that address social justice issues; Whenever possible, hiring minority vendors; Investing in cash bail initiatives for non-violent offenders; Sending St. John’s presence to boards/initiatives; Supporting community activities and outreach already underway. Join the Union of Black Episcopalians as a parish and as individuals.
  - **Storytelling Conversation Series** – We have been moved when members of this group shared personal stories; Stories and personal experiences have the power to change hearts and minds. Our members are interested in continuing discussions about racism and healing, but we need to bring it closer to home. Sharing St. John’s and Tallahassee stories about our experiences with race is one way we might localize these issues to our congregation. We need to cover basic topics in these discussions like “Does institutional racism exist?” because we realize most members do not have the level of understanding this group has. Consultation group members can lead these conversations alongside other members and clergy.
  - **Quarterly Educational offerings specific to Race** – Offer a Book study once a quarter all ages and levels; Sermons quarterly focus on Race specifically; Offering Inner Work seminars/short courses to recognize the things we must recognize within our own story in order to grow; Take on a curriculum from The Episcopal Church to tell our stories and to listen to each other better.
  - **Enter into a Covenant with St. Michael and All Angels** – This will be a formal public proclamation of the relationship between St. John’s and St. Michael and All Angels. It will be a major step toward reconciling the past and forging a path forward. St. Michael and All Angels is very excited about the opportunity to formalize our partnership and this covenant could become the model for Episcopal Churches, and other churches who need to heal the wounds of the past and find a way forward.

St. John’s continued engagement in the current ministries and activities as well engaging in new opportunities will help us achieve the remaining pillars: Practicing the Way of Love, and Repairing the Breach in Society and Institutions.

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## A Final Word

It has been said from the inception of this group that it is impossible to dismantle four hundred years of injustice in six months. It is our great hope that the work of this committee continues with some or all of the recommendations noted above, and even greater opportunities that we have not considered yet. This consultation believes in the work we have accomplished over the past six months and knows it will be beneficial to expand and continue this effort parish wide so that we may all live into our baptismal covenant to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”

We would like to thank the clergy for their steadfast support and care during these past six months. Their guidance and prayers for us was integral in the success of this ministry.

Also, we thank Margaret Edwards and Byron Greene from St. Michael and All Angels for their participation in the consultation. Their participation added a level of richness to our discernment and recommendations that we could not have achieved without them.