

Start Here: A Guide on First Steps to Approaching Reparations Work

**An Offering from the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina's
Reparations and Restitution Ministry
Fall 2023**

Introduction

The wilderness setting, imagery, and motifs are plentiful throughout the Bible—think of God tending to Hagar and Ishmael after they’ve been cast out of their home or Jesus’ 40 days of fasting and praying before his public ministry. Wilderness stands outside of civilization, representing a place of isolation, barrenness, and otherness. But in every scenario, deep wisdom comes to those who traverse the wilds of an untamed land. Through praying, sitting with long periods of reflective solitude, meditation, fasting, and communing with the Divine One, transformation comes to those who let the fire of the Holy Spirit mold them within the wilderness landscape.

My friends, we are about to traverse into this wilderness. The very first setting of our journey into reparations work will take place in this spiritual location we often try to avoid. But fear not, wilderness seasons do not last forever, and joy can be found in unexpected places. And yet, it is where we must begin. You may have read the diocesan 2023 Fall/Winter *Disciple* article “It’s About Time” (or heard Rev. Lindsey Ardrey’s convention address) and decided that you are committed to the spiritual quest ahead. If you haven’t read it, put this current document down and return after you’ve read that primer.

Start Here: A Guide on First Steps to Approaching Reparations Work serves as a choose-your-own-adventure guidebook. Understanding that each of us has a different point of entry, this document allows for an on-ramp unique to each community. Three tiers detailing a progressive journey to engaging matters of reparative work provide the bulk of content. Within each tier, you’ll find a description and a short list of resources. There are thousands of materials on race, racism, racial healing, and the like ready for your consumption out in the world. The lists in *Start Here* are intentionally short and repetitive because it *is* possible to have too much information at one time. Shorter lists are also indicative of this ministry’s aim to focus on conversations, building relationships, and cultivating trust with other sojourners.

The end of the document lists all the folks prepared to help. Coaches for the Contingency of Curious Churches are a group of clergy and lay people facilitating hard conversations, taking bold and creative steps forward, and organizing pilgrimages with their churches. They are not experts but are well-versed in holding hands with fear so that Truth can have her say. They are ready to encourage you along the way.

This piece is an offering, not a typical curriculum with a known outcome or rigid rules. *Start Here* is meant to be generative and fluid, recognizing that the process is dynamic and will change over time. At the bookends of each tier, ask your group, “What do reparations look like for us in our specific context and with our unique history?” You may not have a concrete answer, or any answer at all, but mindfully threading this question and the theme of reparations into each tier will shape your process.

Finally, you will see the words “inward” and “outward” next to each tier’s heading as a signal for the suggested posture to take. Begin looking out into the world and observing the various systems at play. Then grab a mirror and turn inward and end by facing back out to the world. All parishes, no matter the racial make-up, can use this guide. The wounds of racism and white supremacy have affected us all and we each have our own work to do. We have Jesus and each other, which is all we need to traverse the wilderness together. May Spirit guide our steps.

The Rev. Lindsey Ardrey,
Canon Missioner for Reparations and Restitution Ministry

Tier One (Outward Facing)

Start here if you have been desiring to get involved in the work of racial healing, but something has been holding you back. Perhaps it all feels overwhelming, or too daunting of a task. Maybe you are afraid that you'll mess up or say the wrong thing to the wrong person. Maybe you're deeply interested, but your community shows lackluster energy to do the work with you. Or maybe you feel shame because you started down this path some time ago and your efforts fizzled out. These are all valid feelings and you're certainly not alone in experiencing them. This is a very vulnerable journey to embark upon and your loving ego will do its very best to protect you from anything it perceives as scary, painful, or potentially harmful. Possibly unearthing the truth that someone you once admired intentionally performed or desired the harm of others is scary, learning about the realities of slavery is painful, and renegotiating your entire worldview could cause ruptures to the relationships you hold dear.

As you begin, deal gently with yourself, and take the posture of a curious child exploring new terrain. The resources here are to help acquaint you with the vocabulary and systemic nature of racism.

Resources:

- Trainings and Formation Programs
 - Diocesan training [“Introduction to Dismantling Racism: Reclaiming our Baptismal Promise”](#)
 - [Diocesan and local Sacred Ground groups](#)
 - [Racial Equity Institute](#) (REI) training
- Experiences
 - Attend the annual Diocesan History Day
 - Participate in a diocesan and/or parish pilgrimage
- Media
 - Read *Initial Report: The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina’s History of Institutional Racism (Founding through 1960)* by The Rev. Dr. Rhonda M. Lee (coming soon to diocesan reparations and restitution website)
 - Worship with *Initial Report: Breathing Through a Difficult History, a Companion Guide* (coming soon to diocesan reparations and restitution website)
 - Read *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menekem
 - Visit [The Episcopal Church website](#) for racial reconciliation
 - Read through the ["Understanding The Episcopal Church’s Beloved Community"](#) program on The Episcopal Church’s website
 - Watch this [video by St. Luke’s, Salisbury](#) on Becoming Beloved Community
 - Listen to the [Roundtables on Race](#) podcast hosted by The Rev. Kathy Walker

Tier Two (Inward Facing)

Start here if you've attended the aforementioned trainings and feel like you have a solid grasp on the systemic and pervasive personality of racism. You and your church group may have participated in or led one (or even a few) book studies and you're not quite sure where to go next. Take the time to help your body metabolize the information you've received from Tier One by turning inward and beginning to get curious about yourself and your immediate surroundings.

Apply the lessons and the systemic overview to your own community. Dig into your roots, and mine the stories of who came before you. If you are part of an historic church, ask about the land you occupy. Who was there before the church's foundation was laid? Who built the church and what were the labor practices? All churches can ask what members of your congregation figured prominently in local civic and political efforts? What was their stance on slavery, Jim Crow era policies, or integration? And what does it all say about the DNA of your church? How might all of that play into who you are as a corporate body today? How have you interacted with the community around you in the past and currently? How have you behaved toward and around those in different socio-economic classes, races, or cultures from you? If you or your church are descendants of the formerly enslaved, what triumphs and struggles shape your history?

The resources provided will help you dig deeper into yourself and the inner world of your community. Return to some resources from Tier One as the Spirit moves you.

Resources:

- Trainings and Formation Programs
 - Continue any programs in Tier One that speak to you
- Experiences
 - Reach out to The Rev. Brooks Graebner, our diocesan historiographer
 - Schedule some time with our diocesan archivist Lynn Hoke
 - Participate in a diocesan or parish pilgrimage, perhaps creating your own
- Media
 - Use [Native Land Digital's webpage](#) to learn who originally occupied and currently occupies the land that you now call home
 - Read *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-first Century* by William A. Darity, Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen
 - Read *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* by Tricia Hersey
 - View [articles on the racial history of the diocese](#) written and compiled by our historiographer and archivist
 - Study the lives and ministries of biblical prophets, religious mystics and modern day prophets

- Read *The Land is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* by Sarah Augustine
- Read *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menekem and use the embodied meditation practices
- Read *Black and Episcopalian: The Struggle for Inclusion* by The Rev. Gayle Fisher-Stewart

Tier Three (Outward Facing)

Start here if you've exhausted all of your Tier Two resources and feel grounded in what you have learned. Now is the time for you to get specific. Revisit the questions you've been asking at the beginning and end of each tier: What does reparations look like for us, in our specific context and with our unique history? For reference, you may look to other churches with a similar historical pattern and see what they have done. Have conversations with them and learn from their successes and near misses. Where did they stumble and how did they recover? Take inventory of the hurts, the wounds, and the harms done both intentionally and unintentionally against others based upon race. What have your predecessors endured or been complicit in? What has your silence or inaction co-signed? How have you consciously and unconsciously internalized the history of your church and wider society?

Gather the answers to the questions and assume your outward-facing posture once again to discern what reparative action to take. Break your inventory of revelations down into areas of further study. Remember: do not rush this process. You might be in each tier one year or longer.

Resources:

- Trainings and Formation Programs
 - Continue any programs in Tier One that speak to you
- Experiences
 - Create your own worship experience, possibly like "[Liturgy of Remembrance and Truth Telling](#)" by Seminary of the Southwest
 - Stay plugged into diocesan invitations and offerings as they become available
- Media
 - Read *Reparations: A Plan for Churches* by The Rev. Peter Jarrett-Schell
 - Read *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menekem and use the embodied meditation practices
 - Read *Black and Episcopalian: The Struggle for Inclusion* by The Rev. Gayle Fisher-Stewart
 - Read *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* by Tricia Hersey
 - Follow @blackliturgies on Instagram or visit [Cole Arthur Riley's website](#)

Humans Helping Humans (Outward Facing)

- All the earthly saints who are ready to walk with you:
 - Members of the Reparations and Restitution Committee
 - Coaches in the Contingency of Curious Churches (meeting quarterly)
 - Diocesan Staff for Racial Reckoning, Justice, and Healing
 - Diocesan Historiographer
 - Diocesan Archivist
 - Racial Justice and Reconciliation Committee

Concluding Prayer for Reparations

*God, creator of a diverse world and peoples who thirst for justice, freedom and peace. We are here because we want to continue the ongoing work of dismantling racism in this diocese—that sinful combination of prejudice and social power. We turn to you. Help us to be honest about our diocese’s experiences, honest about our own feelings and fears, and honest about facing the daunting task before us to begin to make things right. Help us undertake the work of reparations and restitution—repenting of our sins, repairing the wrong done to others, and seeking peace and reconciliation among us all. That we might truly be persons demanding truth and doing justice. We pray this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.***