

Beloved Community Initiative Report to Diocesan Convention 2023

The Beloved Community Initiative (BCI) seeks to promote the liberating and reconciling love of Jesus Christ, particularly as it relates to racial justice and reconciliation. The BCI will serve specifically to develop strategies, as informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Baptismal Covenant, and our diocesan mission. BCI was established in the summer of 2020 with its official start in September 2023.

We collaborated with District II to offer quarterly workshops on beloved community topics. The first workshop was hosted by St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. The topic was considering how to live into our Baptismal Covenant promises more faithfully. We had a wonderful time together with rich conversation unpacking how our Baptismal Covenant impacts our becoming beloved community. The April meeting was cancelled given the placement of Deacon Hawley to Trinity. We will resume conversations to host more workshops once we elect a new District II Chair.

We have collaborated with Pneuma Institute to provide teaching on Beloved Community Missional Leadership for their most recent graduating cohort. Pneuma Institute provides a two year cohort certification program for Spiritual Directors. The cohort requested Canon Eric to be the keynote speaker at their graduation this spring. There is a retreat scheduled and hosted by Canon Eric September 30, focusing on prayer practices and an introduction to reading scripture through a beloved community lens.

On July 11, 2023, Reading the Bible through the beloved community lens was presented at the "It's All About Love Festival" hosted in Baltimore by the Jesus Movement of the Episcopal Church. The following was the description of the workshop:

Americans often interpret scripture from a place of power and privilege. We often let society, capitalism, and politics shape our faith. What would the world look like if love shaped the world, society, and politics? Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).'" Jesus said to love your enemy (Matthew 5:43-48). Again, Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." What if Jesus actually meant what he said? I invite you to explore with me how Jesus shapes Beloved Community thinking. How might his love ethic change how we see him, hear him? What else could the parables teach us? What does Beloved Community insist we consider when we engage the scriptures seeking understanding toward shaping faith and how we live in community?

The workshop garnered a full capacity attendance and was well received. I was proud to represent our diocese at what could be the last event of this size sponsored by our current Presiding Bishop, Bishop Curry.

Dacon Linda Wilson and I were representatives and participants in the Union of Black Episcopalian annual conference. I facilitated a conversation with Dr. Catherine Meeks, Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta, and The Rev. Melanie Mullen, Director of Reconciliation, Justice, and Creation Care. I also sat on a panel where my focus was speaking on the myth that incarceration is redeeming.

We continue to provide opportunities to read scripture through a beloved community lens on the first Wednesday of the month. We offer opportunities to pray for racial healing with one another on the third Wednesday of the month as well. These offerings are via zoom to maximize access of the opportunity. We are available to hold in person workshops should a parish or group want to collaborate on offering the same in a local more intimate or focused context.

The Sacred Ground curriculum continues to be one of our signature offerings that continues to solicit diocesan participation and interest. Sacred Ground is a film- and readings-based dialogue series on race, grounded in faith and sponsored by the Episcopal Church. We have created cohorts which are hybrid to give anyone in our diocese an opportunity to dialogue with others and to enjoy this powerful program. Shahnaz is our Program Coordinator and lead facilitator for Sacred Ground cohorts via BCI here in our diocese. Below is a summary of our activities for the year:

- 13 parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh have had participants in Sacred Ground.
- 7 Parishes have participated as hosts for Sacred Ground.
- 12 cohorts for Sacred Ground have taken place thus far. The ongoing calendar for 2023-2024 is on the Diocesan website.
- 127 participants with 4 college students completing the sessions for Sacred via zoom as a small group due to courses and on campus living. (These students will train to become leaders for Sacred Ground and want to take it to the Chatham, Carlow, and Pitt Campus for young adults)
- Participants from the Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran churches participated. Also, participants who have no church background.
- We have 16 participants, so far, getting ready to take part in deeper dive (second (action/ deeper dive for Sacred Ground) sessions starting in February of 2024 in two different locations of our Diocese.
- We are partnering with different organizations and young adult groups for panel discussions in each Sacred Ground set of sessions. (Islamic Center, Synagogues, college students, Latinx community, Asian Community, NAACP, Three Rivers Tribal Council, etc.).
- There are “deeper dive” sessions created for repeat Sacred Ground participants. This will allow participants who took the first session to “dig deeper” into content matter

and be more proactive or talk about actionable initiatives as a group or as an individual. These are taking place this fall and are posted for sign up on the Diocesan website.

We are currently working to establish an annual Beloved Community Awards event where nominations will be solicited from our diocese, to celebrate those who have exhibited noteworthy service in establishing beloved community in their contexts representing who we are and aspire to become in the Episcopal Church. This year we are planning to have the awards presented in conjunction with hosting “The Concert for the Human Family,” a concert focusing on beloved community issues and supported and sponsored by the Episcopal Church.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Canon Eric McIntosh
Canon for Beloved Community Initiative