**PROPOSAL FOR REPARATIONS AT THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF GERMANTOWN**

**Revised 3/6/2024**

**The History of this Proposal**

From January 2020 to September 2022, a group of USG members studied the document, Widening the Circle of Concern, by the UUA Commission on Institutional Change, and made recommendations for USG actions that would complement the anti-racism and anti-oppression work already underway at USG.  USG recommendations called for a Reparations Committee to “look at what others are doing and make recommendations for USG actions toward reparations.”  The Reparations Committee began meeting in October 2022.  Several USG members attended an intensive course on Reparations that was offered by the City of Philadelphia Office of Faith-based Initiatives.  Over ninety people from local churches, synagogues, mosques, and meeting houses attended the reparations course.  Building on this momentum, the Reparations Committee formulated this proposal.

**The Rationale for Reparations**

As Unitarian Universalists, we are a people of faith.  We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings (1st Principle).   We are committed to seeking justice, equity, and compassion in human relations (2ndPrinciple).  We hold ourselves accountable to dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions (8th Principle, adopted by USG in 2019).

We live in a society and culture that is built on the ongoing oppression of Black people beginning with institutionalized enslavement and evolving into Jim Crow terrorism.  Government and institutional programs and policies discriminated against Black people.  A war on drugs and racist policing practices targeted Black people for prosecution and incarceration.  Unjust and predatory lending practices systematically excluded Black people from home ownership and wealth building.  The legacies of this oppression are the disenfranchisement of Black people, the enormous wealth gap between Black and white people, police-based terrorism, and mass incarceration of Blacks.

Black members of our congregation have spoken eloquently about the effects of racism on their lives, including at USG.  Their words have been commemorated by the Video Interview Project organized by the Ending Racism Committee for the 150th Anniversary of USG.

*“My idea is that just saying you treat all people the same does not absolve you of responsibility for past and present injustices in this country toward Black people. Your parents lived in Levittown; bought a home for $3,500 in the 40's which is now worth $350,000. Blacks could not buy those homes and were redlined from desirable property all over the United States. Whites accumulated wealth; Blacks were overcharged through unfair loans and restricted to the most dangerous, lowest paying jobs; harassed by recent immigrants denying them union memberships or being made scabs by employers; consigned to inferior schools and therefore not able to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" as many whites feel they should have done.”*

*~ Marietta Tanner*

*“... those 7 principles; it’s just like you go through the motions. Do you really think about what they mean for you and in relation to other people in the rest of the world, not just our little community that we have to preserve? We have to put the principles into action. We need to serve the community more.”*

*~ Marion Watlington*

**What We Mean by Reparations**

We recognize that injustice done to Black people has harmed them and resulted in advantages for white people.  As a community of faith, we hold ourselves and our country accountable by acknowledging the injustice, acknowledging the moral and emotional injury, offering funds toward repair of the harm inflicted, and holding ourselves accountable to ensure that injustice is not repeated.

**Proposed USG Actions**

**Proposed Monetary Reparations**

USG has a compelling reason to perform acts of reparation due to its history.  USG has an endowment that includes The Sullivan Assistance Fund that was created in 1935 with over $16,000 to be used “for the assistance of the poor.”  In the distant past, the annual income from this fund was given to USG members in financial distress.  When those needs were met, the balance of the annual income was distributed to community groups in Mt. Airy and Germantown.

 In the 1990’s, the practice of distributing the money to community groups ceased for unknown reasons, and the fund grew substantially.  During the Covid pandemic, the Board directed $50,000 from the Sullivan Fund to be distributed to local community groups for the support of people in need.  Despite this distribution, the Fund currently amounts to over $250,000.  USG has been remiss in holding onto the money that was left in its care specifically for the needs of the poor.  We live amidst significant poverty in our city and our blindness to the needs of the local community, in the presence of this large monetary resource, must be attributed to institutional racism.

We call upon the Board of Trustees to use a portion of the Sullivan Assistance Fund (SAF) to reverse the effects of institutional racism by creating two separate sub-funds of the SAF with the same goal, aiding the poor, as stated in Mrs. Sullivan’s will.  The sub-funds would differ in the ~~expectation of maintaining or not maintaining the principal~~ intent of the fund.   Each sub-fund would be administered by a separate committee.

* One sub-fund, which we call the “traditional” SAF, would function in a manner like the current SAF.  It would maintain its principal and spend only the annual income.  However, it would be mandated to spend all or a major proportion of the income each year to prevent the over-accumulation of funds.  We ~~suggest~~ recommend that $100,000 be put into this fund.  Based on historical records of the SAF, we believe this amount would generate enough income to meet USG members’ needs on an annual basis.
* The other sub-fund ~~which we call~~ will be called the “Reparations” Fund. ~~, would be expected to spend all its principal and income over a specified time period, such as five years.~~  We ~~suggest~~ recommend that $150,000 be put into this fund.
  1. The funds could be contributed to established organizations that address housing inequities and promote wealth-building opportunities for Black people such as financial assistance with mortgages, supporting first-time home ownership and/or developing affordable housing.
  2. We are not contemplating making direct grants to individuals.
  3. We recommend that the Board appoint a racially diverse committee of members of our congregation to determine the organizations and/or programs that should benefit from USG reparations.

**Proposed Acknowledgment**

In the mid-20th century, we understand that many local Black people did not find a congenial place of worship at USG. Some Black people who wanted to become members of USG were counseled to join other local (Black) churches by one of our ministers and some of the congregants.

At the same time a local real estate practice called “blockbusting” induced white homeowners to sell their homes hastily because of the “threat” of new Black neighbors. Panic selling caused neighborhoods to transform from white to Black overnight. The minister and church members of USG stood up for maintaining Mt. Airy as a racially diverse community, while at the same time, not welcoming people of color into the congregation. In other words, Black people were OK in our neighborhood, but not welcome in our USG house.

In retrospect, we can see that the members of USG were complicit in not speaking out against this unwelcoming stance toward Black people. For this, we are deeply sorry, and we call upon the current members to acknowledge and take responsibility for this part of our history. We express strong regret for these racist practices and the hurt it caused. To repair the harm, USG has re-committed itself to continuing to become a welcoming congregation to all people. The evidence of that commitment is the work we are doing around Widening the Circle, the Anti-racism group, and workshops that help us all find ways to adopt “Preemptive Radical Inclusion” as our standard of welcome.

**A Proposed Path Forward**

We recognize that much work is needed to bring this proposal to fruition.  Since we formed in October of 2022, we have participated in two worship services on this topic (in August and November) and co-sponsored a presentation by the Green Street Friends Meeting on their reparations program in April.  Also in April, we presented the proposal to a group of USG leaders including Widening the Circle leaders.  In October, we presented the proposal to a session of the Elderhood group. We presented the proposal to the USG Board in November 2023 and got the go ahead to present it to the congregation. ~~We welcome your feedback and are open to revising the proposal based on your comments.~~  ~~Starting in~~ In February and March 2024, we ~~will~~ conducted a series of information and education sessions about the Reparations proposal that resulted in these revisions.  We hope our efforts will culminate in a vote of endorsement of the proposal by the congregation and a commitment to participate in its implementation.  It is the hope of the Reparations Committee that taking these actions will set us on a path toward reparative justice.

Respectfully submitted,

The Reparations Committee

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