

Evanston Interfaith Congregation Leaders and Reparations in Evanston

Contrary to much historical narrative, the harm to Black Americans did not end with emancipation. Jim Crow laws in the south and government-designed segregation nationwide continued for more than a hundred years after 1865. Their effects are still felt today in the disparities of wealth, including decreased values of Black-owned property and the lower, and declining, share of Black homeownership. None of the antipoverty programs or laws banning discrimination in housing or employment have addressed the root causes of racism, only some of the symptoms.

For more than fifty years, a faith based movement has been growing in this country in support of reparations for Black Americans. The movement began in part with the 1969 Black Manifesto that asked Christian churches and Jewish synagogues to contribute \$500 million as an act of good faith and true repentance. The concept of reparations has recently gained new momentum from the notoriety afforded by the 2020 murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. Partly as a result, an increasing number of white Americans have become aware of the enormous disadvantages for people of color in their access to housing, health care, nutrition, education and job opportunities and, especially, in their treatment by law enforcement and their disproportionate incarceration.

The intention of reparations is twofold: (1) to acknowledge and compensate for the harm that pervasive structural racism has caused to our society and to individuals; and (2) to move forward by reconciling ourselves with our past. This is important for all Americans, not just for Black Americans.

Reparations will not alone close the wealth gap for Black Americans. No amount of money could adequately compensate for 400 years of systemic subjugation. Reparations first focuses on formally acknowledging collective responsibility for past wrongs and their continuing effects. Funds paid under reparations are a means to acknowledge past wrongdoing and attempt to reverse its effects in the present, knowing that we cannot reverse all the harm done.

The Evanston City Council passed two ordinances supporting reparations. The first acknowledged the systemic racism present in the City's residential zoning between 1919 and 1969, and the second established a method to pay reparations of up to \$10 million through allocation of cannabis tax receipts. The first voucher recipients were selected in December 2021 and were focused on [restorative housing](#). A companion non-profit, the [Evanston Reparations Community Fund](#), has been created to build an endowment so that reparations can continue after the City funding is exhausted. The Fund is also not subject to restrictions faced by municipalities paying reparations to their Black residents.

Other cities have begun to follow Evanston's lead. The Chicago City Council has discussed, but has not yet passed, a resolution to establish a commission to consider reparations. In addition, eleven mayors, including those of Los Angeles and St. Louis, have formed a working group to

advance reparations in their cities. Other cities or counties, such as Amherst, MA and Kalamazoo, MI have passed reparations ordinances and others are in progress.

Additionally, [H.R. 40](#) has been introduced in the House of Representatives in every session of Congress since 1989. In 2021, for the first time, it progressed through the Judiciary Committee, and Senator Cory Booker introduced a companion bill, S. 40 in the Senate. Both call for the creation of a commission to study reparations for Black Americans.

What can EICL do to support the reparations effort in Evanston?

1. Reparations is more than financial compensation; it's an opportunity to educate and address structural racism and begin the work of repairing the psychic, economic, emotional, and physical damage that racism has caused Black Americans. To this end, we feel that we as religious leaders have moral suasion and a responsibility to lead in this area by figuring out a process of reconciliation and atonement and helping to lead our community towards healing.
2. We can educate our community about the history of racism in our country, including the racism in our own community. To this end, we are collecting videos of programs conducted at Evanston-area religious institutions to share with each other and our communities. We also believe it's important to enhance the education efforts in our community by collectively creating more programs for all of us to share. These may include, but are not limited to: story telling programs in which Black residents can share their stories of discrimination and White residents can share their stories of privilege; we can learn about racism in Evanston through the work of Shorefront Legacy Center and its director, Dino Robinson; and congregations can share the history of racism in their communities.
3. Educate our community about the reparations' efforts in Evanston, including understanding how the two funds—the City of Evanston fund and the Reparations Community Fund—will raise funds, how those funds will be distributed, and who has the authority to make decisions about fund distributions.
4. Raise money to support the reparations efforts in Evanston, including the Evanston Reparations Community Fund, which is the fiscal agent for Reparations Stakeholders of Evanston. In January 2023, we will total and celebrate contributions and pledges made through our efforts and encourage that support to be ongoing.

Beth Emet The Free Synagogue
Buddhist Council of the Midwest
Evanston Bahá'í Community
Evanston Friends Meeting
First Congregational Church of Evanston
First United Methodist Church
Grace Lutheran Church
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wilmette
Lake Street Church of Evanston
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Northminster Presbyterian Church
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
United Catholic Youth Ministries (Catholic Parishes)
Unitarian Church of Evanston