

PROJECT Gabriel

President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

Final Report | September 2023

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VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

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Introduction and Project Overview

At its core, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a historically-renowned institution committed to academic excellence and its urban roots. The history of the university dates to 1968 when the Medical College of Virginia (MCV) and Richmond Professional Institute (RPI) merged. While the university celebrates its academic achievements, the institution must also reckon with a past marked by mistreatment, lack of respect, and national events that have sown mistrust and fear in the communities served.

In spring 2023, Virginia Commonwealth University’s Office of the President launched Project Gabriel to report, reconcile and heal the wounds caused by VCU’s historic ties to the institution of slavery. Through this project, VCU is embarking on a transformative journey. This initiative represents a profound commitment to reconciling the past to the present, strengthening community ties, and charting a course towards a brighter, more equitable future for the university and those it serves.

Project Gabriel is in response to legislation (Va. Code § 23.1-615.1) established by the Virginia General Assembly on March 30, 2021, that focuses on Virginia’s five oldest colleges and universities, which includes VCU. This legislation specifically relates to the establishment of the *Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program*.

The project is named for Gabriel, an enslaved Black man who was owned by Thomas Prosser of Henrico County. After a foiled attempt to capture the Capitol and hold Governor James Monroe hostage to bargain for freedom for Virginia’s slaves, Gabriel was executed by hanging on August 30, 1800.

Despite the outcome of Gabriel’s rebellion, his fierce desire to free himself and others from the shackles of slavery resonates today – some 223 years after enslaved informants and a violent storm thwarted his plans.

Gabriel’s murder and those of at least three dozen other Black men and women who were regarded as leaders of the planned rebellion, bear a haunting resemblance to the dozens of human bones and artifacts that were discovered in an abandoned well during construction on Virginia Commonwealth University’s MCV Campus in April 1994. Like the disregard shown when executing Gabriel and others, the well’s contents – the remains of what once were full human bodies – are believed to have been discarded by medical staff in the 1800s without the dignity of proper burial.

“These humans, mainly of African descent, were not shown the respect they were due, neither in life nor in death,” reads a statement from the Office of the VCU President on the East Marshall Street Well Project’s (EMSWP) website (<https://emsw.vcu.edu/>). “The university is committed to moving forward in a manner reflecting the dignity that should be accorded these individuals and has created the East Marshall Street Well Project to facilitate a process with the community that ensures the remains receive appropriate study, memorialization and reburial.”

Office of the President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

Thus, driven by Gabriel's boldness, courage and conviction, and the sacrifices of Black bodies used for unauthorized medical research, Project Gabriel's mission is clear. The mission is to guide VCU on a path toward reckoning with its past, engaging with its present and strengthening all communities served for the future.

Commission Members

The commission is comprised of professionals and community leaders from different genders, races, sectors and walks of life:

Co-chairs

Sheryl L. Garland, MHA, FACHE - Chief of Health Impact-VCU Health System; Executive Director- VCU Office of Health Equity

Clifton L. Peay, M.D. - VCU Board Member; Founding Medical Director- The American Eye Center; Ophthalmologist

Members

Edward "Ed" Ayers, Ph.D.- Tucker-Boatwright Professor of the Humanities and President Emeritus- University of Richmond; Historian

Faye Belgrave, Ph.D. - Associate Dean for Equity and Community Partnerships in the College of Humanities and Sciences; Professor of psychology, and founding director of the Center for Cultural Experiences in Prevention, VCU

Yvonne Brandon, Ed.D. - Managing Director- The Aria Group; Former Superintendent, Richmond Public Schools

Nakeina E. Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D. - Associate Professor and Director of the Research Institute for Social Equity, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs at VCU

Leonard Edloe, PharmD - Retired CEO and Pharmacist, Edloe's Professional Pharmacies; Pastor, New Hope Fellowship

Kevin Harris, Ph.D. - Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer, VCU School of Medicine

Maya Johnson - VCU School of Medicine, May 2023 graduate

William "Bill" Martin- Director - The Valentine, Richmond, Virginia

Tobi Ojo - Student-Health Services Major, VCU Class of 2026

Rhonda Keyes Pleasants - Manager-Henry W. Dabney Funeral Home; Family Representative Council, East Marshall St. Well Project

Ad-hoc

Lauranett Lee, Ph.D. - Director of Race and Justice at Richmond Hill, Visiting Scholar in the Center for Civic Engagement and Adjunct Assistant Professor, Liberal Arts Historian, The University of Richmond

Office of the President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

Staff

Jonsette Calloway - Communications Manager, Vice President for Administration, VCU

Matthew Conrad, J.D. - Vice President for Government and External Relations, VCU

Miles Gordon - Senior Director for State Government Relations, VCU

Work Group Members

VCU Identification and Memorialization Work Group for Project Gabriel

Edward "Ed" Ayers, Ph.D.	Project Gabriel Commission
Faye Belgrave, Ph.D.	Project Gabriel Commission
Leonard Edloe, PharmD	Project Gabriel Commission
Val Adams, M.D.	Community Member
Holly Alford	VCU School of Arts
Deborah Booker	First African Baptist Church, President FABC Historical Commission
Muzi Branch	East Marshall Street Well Project
Stephen Davenport	VCU Community Engagement
Brenda Edwards	Community Member
Carmen Foster, Ed.D.	East Marshall Street Well Project
Pastor F. Todd Gray	Faith Leader, Fifth Baptist Church
Pastor Ralph Hodge	Faith Leader, Second Baptist Church
Magnus Johnsson	VCU Development and Alumni Relations
Rhonda Keyes Pleasants	Project Gabriel Commission and East Marshall Street Well Project
Gregg Kimball, Ph.D.	Library of Virginia
Bill Martin	Valentine Museum
Stephanie Smith	East Marshall Street Well Project
Rich Sliwoski	VCU Facilities Management
Shakia Gullette Warren	Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia

VCU Community-Based Economic Development Programs for Communities Work Group for Project Gabriel

Nakeina E. Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D.	VCU L. Douglas Wilder School
Chelsie Dunn, Ph.D.	VCU L. Douglas Wilder School
Anthony Starke, Ph.D.	VCU L. Douglas Wilder School
Janis Allen	Community Member
Mikell Brown, Ph.D.	Brightpoint Community College
Elizabeth Creamer	Community College Workforce Alliance
Rasheeda Creighton	JWC Foundation
Verenda Cobbs	Senior Manager for Civic Innovation & Partnerships, VCU Community Engagement and Government Relations Richmond City Office of Minority Business Development
Patricia Foster	VCU Community Engagement
Shari Garmise, Ph.D.	VCU REAL Program
Erin Webster Garrett	Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond
Stephanie Glenn	Greater Richmond Continuum of Care
Kelly King Horne	Reynolds Community College
Nakia James	VCU Continuing Education
Cairo Jones	VCU Student Government Association
Sincere Slade-Reading	Richmond City Office of Economic Development
Leonard Sledge	Feed More
David Waidelich	Metropolitan Business League
Micah White	

VCU Community-Based Economic Development Programs for Individuals Work Group for Project Gabriel

Sheryl Garland, MHA, FACHE	VCU Health System Community Impact
Porsha Bennett	VCU Health Workforce Development
Nanette Bailey	Richmond Public Schools
Ron Brown	Community Member
Vaughn Garland, Ph.D., MFA	VCU Community Engagement
Dionne Henderson	Partnership for the Future

Jase Hatcher	Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
Kateland Henson	Legal Aid Justice Center
Curtis Lee	Community Member
Maghboeba Mosavel, Ph.D	VCU Community Engagement
Angel Perkins	Communities in Schools

VCU Scholarships Work Group for Project Gabriel

Kevin Harris, Ph.D.	Associate Dean, DEI, VCU School of Medicine
Norman Bedford, M.Ed.	Associate Vice President for Student Financial Service
Yvonne Brandon, Ed.D.	Managing Director- The Aria Group; Former Richmond Public Schools Superintendent

Jay Bonfili, MPA	Senior Associate Vice President for Health Sciences - Finance and Administration
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Margaret Ann Bollmeier	President and CEO of the MCV Foundation
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Susan Bodnar-Deren, Ph.D.	Chair, Associate Professor, Sociology, VCU
Verenda Cobbs	Senior Manager for Civic Innovation & Partnerships, VCU Community Engagement and Government Relations

Kathleen Rudasill, Ph.D.	Interim Dean, VCU School of Education
Sean Miller	President & CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Richmond
Samantha Wheeler Marrs	VCU Senior Associate Vice President for Campaign Administration

Tiffany Thomas	Partnership for the Future
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Foundation for Project Gabriel

The work of the Project Gabriel Commission is inextricably linked to VCU's mission and values. These form the foundation for the recommendations that are presented in this report.

Official VCU mission: Why we're here

Virginia Commonwealth University and its academic health sciences center serve as one national urban public research institution dedicated to the success and well-being of our students, patients, faculty, staff and community through:

- **Real-world learning** that furthers civic engagement, inquiry, discovery and innovation
- **Research** that expands the boundaries of new knowledge and creative expression and promotes translational applications to improve the quality of human life
- **Interdisciplinary** collaborations and community partnerships that advance innovation, enhance cultural and economic vitality, and solve society's most complex challenges
- **Health sciences** that preserve and restore health for all people, seek the cause and cure of diseases through groundbreaking research and educate those who serve humanity
- **Deeply ingrained core values** of diversity, inclusion and equity that provide a safe, trusting and supportive environment to explore, create, learn and serve

Values: What we hold dear

- **Accountability:** Commit to the efficient and transparent stewardship of our resources to achieve institutional excellence
- **Achievement:** Pursue excellence in learning, research and scholarly pursuits; service; and patient care
- **Collaboration:** Foster respect, collegiality and cooperation to advance learning, entrepreneurship and inquiry
- **Freedom:** Strive for intellectual truth with responsibility and civility, respecting the dignity of all individuals
- **Innovation:** Cultivate discovery, creativity, originality, inventiveness and talent
- **Service:** Engage in the application of learning and discovery to improve the human condition and support the public good at home and abroad
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Ensure a climate of mutual trust and respect where individuals of different cultural backgrounds, identities, abilities and life experiences are embraced, engaged and empowered to drive excellence and success.

Background and Commission Charge

On March 30, 2021, with the full support of VCU, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation (Va. Code § 23.1-615.1. Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program) focused on Virginia's five oldest colleges and universities - Longwood University, The College of William and Mary, The University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Military Institute.

Following are excerpts from the legislation:

I. The Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program (the Program) is established for the purpose of reckoning with the history of the Commonwealth, addressing the long legacy of slavery in the Commonwealth, and acknowledging that the foundational success of several public institutions of higher education was based on the labor of enslaved individuals.

II. Consistent with the purpose set forth in subsection A, Longwood University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, the Virginia Military Institute, and The College of William and Mary in Virginia shall each implement and execute the Program, with any source of funds other than state funds or tuition or fee increases, by annually

- (i) identifying and memorializing, to the extent possible, all enslaved individuals who labored on former and current institutionally controlled grounds and property and
- (ii) providing a tangible benefit such as a college scholarship or community-based economic development program for individuals or specific communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery that will empower families to be lifted out of the cycle of poverty.

III. Each institution set forth in subsection B shall annually submit to the Council information on the implementation of the Program. The Council shall compile such information in a report and submit such report no later than November 1 each year to the Chairmen of the House Committee on Appropriations, the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Education and Health, the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, and the Virginia African American Advisory Board.

Following the passage of Va. Code § 23.1-615.1, Virginia Commonwealth University President Michael Rao quickly commissioned highly regarded archivist and clinical history expert Peter Wosh, Ph.D., and VCU Libraries archivist and senior health sciences curator, Jodi Koste, Ph.D. to lead its efforts to more fully understand the Medical College of Virginia's (MCV) connections to the institution of slavery. The results of the report, [*"Slavery and the Medical College of Virginia: A Report for Virginia Commonwealth University,"*](#) indicated that from its inception in 1838, MCV was built and operated using the labor of enslaved people. The full report was presented to VCU's Board of Visitors in December 2022.

Summary of the Commission’s Work

In January 2023, “*Project Gabriel: President’s Special Commission on Slavery and Justice*” was formed to evaluate the report’s findings and determine a path forward. The commission – led by VCU Board of Visitors member Clifton Peay, M.D., and VCU Health System Chief of Health Impact-Sheryl Garland, MHA, FACHE – quickly formed committees and work groups to carry out its charge.

The first commission meeting took place January 26, 2023, on Zoom, during which a timeline and key components of mapping, executing, and implementing Project Gabriel were created. Commission members strongly agreed that community input was not only needed but crucial to the success of such an ambitious endeavor. “Any and all recommendations must be thoughtful and carefully constructed to convey the importance and magnitude of Virginia Commonwealth University’s commitment in this process,” commission members agreed. The commission was directed to report its findings and recommendations to the VCU Board of Visitors during its May and September 2023 meetings.

VCU’s President’s Special Commission on Slavery and Justice also studied several universities, including the University of Virginia and William and Mary, that began identifying and researching the role of slavery at their institutions more than a decade ago. Highly regarded memorialization and reconciliation projects established by the University of Virginia (Memorial to Enslaved Laborers) and the College of William and Mary (The Lemon Project) are notable for their commitment to inclusiveness, while sharing inquiry, knowledge, truth, and values.

Brown University, the nation’s seventh oldest university that was formally chartered in 1764, is regarded as a leader in confronting its past involving the transatlantic slave trade. Slavery is an indelible part of the Providence, Rhode Island university’s history, and is methodically documented in the 2006 “*Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice.*” The report was updated in 2021, and a portion of its description reads:

“Fifteen years have passed since Brown released its groundbreaking Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice and, in doing so, confronted and publicly documented the University’s complex and painful history with the transatlantic slave trade and its terrible legacies of inequity and injustice. The Report, which was commissioned under the thoughtful leadership of President Ruth J. Simmons, set a high standard for rigorous, unflinching analysis and became a model of responsible scholarship that helped to spark a national conversation, as Brown was among the first institutions of higher education in the United States to publicly catalogue its ties to slavery.”

As such, Brown’s trailblazing work has resulted in a *Slavery Memorial* by Martin Puryear, which stands outside University Hall on the Front Green or “Quiet Green.” Brown also pledged its commitment to the ongoing recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty, the establishment of the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, and the permanent endowment of the Fund for the Education of the Children of Providence.

Other leading institutions to conduct research regarding their ties with slavery include Emory University, Harvard University, Rice University, and the University of North Carolina.

Thoughtful and carefully curated commemorations to result from such research include:

- Honoring enslaved people through memorialization, research, symposia, curricula and learning opportunities
- Partnering with historically Black colleges and universities
- Identifying, engaging, and supporting direct descendants of enslaved people
- Honoring, engaging, and supporting Native communities
- Establishing scholarships and other funding for students and faculty recruitment.

Full transparency and engagement by all institutions are recurring themes cited in many of the university reports.

It is with the same commitment and fortitude that VCU must continue to reckon with its history involving enslaved people. In his 2022 report, Dr. Wosh explains how MCV, when founded, relied on enslaved workers:

“The Medical College of Virginia (MCV) remained thoroughly embedded within the institution of slavery from its founding in 1838. Tax lists and census data confirm that MCV routinely owned and/or rented at least between four and eight enslaved laborers each year. They cooked, cleaned, laundered, maintained buildings and grounds, nursed patients, and aided physicians. One enslaved person assisted in the anatomy department and helped to procure cadavers primarily from African-American burial grounds. MCV actively cultivated enslavers. The college offered them favorable terms to care for their enslaved laborers in the infirmary. Official institutional rhetoric took increasingly aggressive proslavery positions in the late antebellum period. During the Civil War, the college routinely hired out and sold enslaved people to generate income. MCV profited in both concrete and indirect ways from slavery.

This culture permeated both the institution and the individuals connected with it. The board of visitors overwhelmingly consisted of wealthy enslavers. Forced labor contributed to their substantial fortunes. The faculty grew up in privileged circumstances. Enslaved persons managed their households and supported their private medical practices. Professors often conducted clinical research and experimental procedures on African-Americans without their consent, writing up the results in medical journals. Students hailed overwhelmingly from rural Virginia households headed by enslavers. They relied on the institution to finance their medical educations.”

Reflecting on the Impact of MCV's History

Much of the history of MCV and VCU, which was established in 1968 with the merger of the Medical College of Virginia and the Richmond Professional Institute (RPI), is intertwined with the complex past of the City of Richmond. The City played a prominent role in the slave trade as well as the adoption of laws and practices that supported the dehumanization of African Americans. The Medical College of Virginia grew in stature and reputation throughout the 19th century due to its innovation in clinical treatment and medical research. Part of its reputation as a medical school was associated with its ability to obtain specimens for research. A dark part of the organization's history is the method in which human bodies were often obtained, used for medical experimentation without permission, and discarded. This history was placed in the spotlight in April 1994 when human bones and artifacts were discovered in an abandoned well during the construction of the Kontos Medical Sciences building. The human remains, primarily from individuals of African descent, were believed to have been discarded by medical staff during the 1800s. This discovery led to the launch of the East Marshall Street Well Project (EMSWP) to "facilitate a process with the community that ensures the remains (discovered) receive appropriate study, memorialization and reburial". (<https://emsw.vcu.edu>)

History has shown the struggles endured by men and women like Gabriel and those whose remains were uncovered in the East Marshall Street Well continue today – some 185 years since enslaved people were declared free in 1865. After decades of civil and human rights abuses, injustices and racial inequities, there remains a duty to examine the history of the institution including medical experimentation commonly practiced at MCV on Black bodies.

During one commission meeting, Luranett Lee, Ph.D. discussed past medical experimentation on Black patients at MCV and the need to explore this topic further. The Commission members agreed this was an important subject and noted that more agency has been given to the topic in recent years. During a VCU public forum in September 2022, Former Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder shared the story of his representation of the family of Bruce Tucker, whose heart was transplanted without his or his family's knowledge or consent at the Medical College of Virginia in 1968.

This event was chronicled by journalist Chip Jones in his 2020 book "The Organ Thieves," which explores MCV's controversial and racially-charged first heart transplant. In a September 1, 2022, Richmond Free Press commentary, Mr. Jones noted that VCU had not issued a public apology for MCV's deeds. On September 16, 2022, VCU's Board of Visitors and the Board of Directors of VCU Health System Authority issued the following in resolutions:

"NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, VCU acknowledges and sincerely apologizes to the late Mr. Bruce Tucker, and to his family, for the Medical College's transplant of his heart 54 years ago.

VCU President Michael Rao also issued the following statement:

"Being devoted to inclusion means honestly facing past actions with humility and transparency. "We sincerely apologize to Mr. Bruce Tucker, his family and all of those hurt by deplorable past practices."

Despite the apology, many Richmond residents who are familiar with MCV/VCU’s history continue to question the university’s commitment to its Black communities as evidenced by concerns and comments shared during the Project Gabriel community forums.

“Trust,” stated Commission Co-Chairman Dr. Clifton Peay during several meetings since January 2023. “We have to make sure that we’re building trust in the community.”

Recognizing this important issue, the Commission members contemplated ways to address themes such as the enormous and difficult task of tracking historical patient records, and the role of geography and opportunities to leverage the East Marshall Street Well Project (EMSWP) research throughout that first January 2023 meeting. Questions raised included:

- *How does the commission ensure inclusion and input in our forums?*
- *How do we gauge and target ourselves to meet milestones?*
- *How/when do we engage the public and determine logistics around this?*
- *How large should the committees be and which experts should we invite to be commission members?*

Within two weeks of the first meeting, many of those questions were answered as the commission members began the process of meeting biweekly and its plans to host a series of forums unfolded. A comprehensive communications plan outlined calendars, platforms, strategies, and timelines to reach these targeted audiences:

VCU community

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff

VCU Health

- Administration
- Staff
- Visitors

Greater Richmond community, including:

- Richmond Public Schools
- The City of Richmond
- Community Colleges
- Faith Community
- Community Activists

“We Are the Uncommon”

An estimated 100 students, employees and community members gathered at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School on March 21, 2023 for the first community forum of the Virginia Commonwealth University Project Gabriel: President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice.

“Through Project Gabriel, our goal is to engage, to have dialogue about actionable recommendations and [to make] meaningful changes that will reflect the inclusive communities that we are today, particularly when I talk about the university and I talk about the health system,” said VCU President Michael Rao during the forum. “So getting input from as many of our communities as possible — and that begins with all of you who are here tonight — is a really important part of this work.”

Subsequent forums and meetings at VCU, Richmond churches and a virtual discussion received prominent displays or mentions in local news media, including NBC-12, the Richmond Free Press and the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Three separate forums and meetings in March and April attracted approximately 200 people, and meetings in June and July had similar results. Working professionals, community members, activists, fraternity and sorority leaders, retirees, parents and others who value VCU as a partner attended the sessions.

Since the launch of Project Gabriel, the initiative has consistently been communicated by VCU's news and marketing centers to further inform Richmond and surrounding communities about the careful and serious work transpiring to ensure its approval, execution, and long-term success. Project Gabriel's ultimate success will directly reflect VCU's “UNCOMMON” identity that embraces inclusion, creativity, health, and knowledge in an urban environment.

“In a world of the common, we are the uncommon.”

Several important themes emerged from the community forums:

- Creating a physical structure to honor and recognize enslaved workers
- Naming a building that will “make our ancestors known”
- Humanizing enslaved people
- Ensuring that VCU owns its history
- Building continuity and sustainability
- Educating and building awareness among local communities and the university about VCU's efforts to reconcile its past

The Commission met a total of 12 times between January and August 2023. To support its goal of ensuring the voice of community representatives was heard, a total of five community forums were held with facilitated discussions around the topics of memorialization, scholarships and community-based economic development programs for individuals and communities.

After the Project Gabriel forums, commission members and work groups comprising VCU and community representatives discussed several key themes and sub-themes that emerged. In addition to those listed above, recurring themes included creating a space for students and

community members to engage and reflect on community history. Also, expanding the voices within the VCU community and the community at large was deemed important. Doing so will ensure community members' access to the memorials' physical structure(s). Another important point made was a need to engage Richmond's vibrant faith community more fully in this process.

Four work groups that totaled nearly 50 VCU representatives and community members were charged to collate the information and develop operational plans to support the implementation of the recommendations. A strong sense of collegiality and sense of purpose permeated this work which, again, aligns with VCU's "Uncommon" identity:

"Ours is a culture where diversity and inclusion foster excellence. Ideas, participation, and access from different backgrounds blend to make VCU, Richmond, and the world a better place."

The Commission was then tasked with making recommendations to the Board that align with the charge from the Va. Code § 23.1-615.1. Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program:

- Identifying and memorializing, to the extent possible, all enslaved individuals who labored on former and current institutionally controlled grounds and property and
- Providing a tangible benefit such as a college scholarship or community-based economic development program for individuals or specific communities with a demonstrated historic connection to slavery that will empower families to be lifted out of the cycle of poverty.

The Commission respectfully present recommendations categorized accordingly:

- I. Identification and Memorialization
- II. Scholarships
- III. Community-Based Economic Development Programs for Individuals and Communities

Specific plans and processes for implementation will be developed for each strategy, with a focus on prioritization in the first year and implementation in subsequent years. It should also be noted that these recommendations:

- Reflect a commitment to community, equity and justice,
- Represent a unique opportunity to make VCU better, expand its mission, and strengthen the university,
- Are both actions and transformative steps,
- Will help VCU grow into a forward-focused, inclusive institution, and
- Acknowledge the organization's history and create tangible, lasting change.

Recommendations

I. Identification and Memorialization

The Identification and Memorialization recommendations focus on the restoration of the First African Baptist Church to serve as a hub for educational, social and economic revitalization and have major significance given the role this church has played in the history of the Black population in Richmond. First African Baptist Church originated on 14th and Broad streets in the mid-1800s. The church was sold to the Medical College of Virginia circa 1953 and the congregation moved to a location on Richmond's Northside. Mirroring its historical role in providing a space for sharing ideas and bringing people together, it was suggested the revitalized original building host educational modules in the future for various forms of learning materials such as courses, workshops, online resources and in-person strategies.

The Identification and Memorialization work group also suggests the possibility of crowdsourcing from VCU units and partnering with major regional partners in workforce credentialing to determine shared resources. Because this initiative will require a major fund development commitment to renovate the building and implement programming, it is recommended that financial resources from digital and technology companies be sought.

The recommendations and supporting strategies are:

- a. Undertake research efforts to determine if the names and backgrounds of the enslaved people who labored on MCV grounds and property can be identified.
- b. Explore the use of First African Baptist Church (Randolph Minor Hall) as a memorialization site for these enslaved people.
 - i. Conduct a pre-planning study to explore a variety of possible programming uses for the Randolph Minor Hall building (formerly known as the First African Baptist Church).
 - ii. Establish clear roles and responsibilities for the operation and maintenance of the facility in the future.
 - iii. Assess and determine how this effort may complement or compete with other possible donors' interests with Richmond projects dealing with enslavement and reconciliation.
 - iv. Establish a compelling case statement and examine fundraising feasibility.
 - v. Explore the feasibility of requesting a Budget Amendment in the 2024 Regular Session of the General Assembly session in an amount to be determined for planning and other costs.
 - vi. Secure funding for the design and renovation of the First African Baptist Church (Randolph Minor Hall) building.
 - vii. Convey the First African Baptist Church site, in an effort to restore the historic landmarks, to Virginia Union University; through conveyance VCU and VUU would establish a national model for racial reconciliation.
- c. Establish the First African Baptist Church as a hub for educational, social and economic revitalization while honoring its legacy of leadership and advocacy as the moral center of the individuals who have a demonstrated connection to slavery or those who are still experiencing the legacy of slavery.

- i. Ensure that the building will have spaces that focus on memorialization, connection to the College Alley, telling the history of the institution, archival research for medical issues that concern the black community, etc.
 - ii. Document the work of the Project Gabriel Commission.
 - iii. Engage the Middle of Broad, VCU School of the Arts, and students.
 - iv. Collaborate with the EMSWP on 3D scans of human remains.
 - d. Align with the Family Representative Council (FRC) of the East Marshall Street Well Project (EMSWP) to develop memorialization initiatives.
 - i. Identify memorialization locations for the EMSWP ancestors, to include an interment site.
 - ii. Construction of a significantly appropriate Memorial and an Interactive Learning Center at the site of interment.
 - iii. Establish an annual memorialization event to be observed by all medical students prior to undertaking their first anatomy class.
 - iv. Develop formal guidelines for appropriate university actions, including community engagement, in the event of future discovery of human skeletal remains or material culture.
 - v. Work with the EMSWP Memorialization and Interment Committee to develop Request for Proposals (RFPs) related to memorialization and interment locations and design concepts.

II. Scholarships

The recommendations are:

- a. Subject to applicable law, establish a minimum of 5-8 scholarships consistent with the requirements of the Va. Code § 23.1-615.1 *Enslaved Ancestors College Access Scholarship and Memorial Program*.
- b. Consider the establishment of “Gabriel Scholars” that:
 - i. Entails an annual scholarship to occur no less than the period the institution used enslaved labor (27 years).
 - ii. Are endowed through fundraising efforts above any other scholarships currently established or planned.
 - iii. Build off established MCV Foundation equity scholarships for professional and graduate cohorts at the VCU Health Sciences Schools.
- c. Augment scholarships with robust advising and wrap-around services to ensure the success of participants both during and after attendance at VCU.
- d. Establish specific scholarships within VCU's schools of health sciences for both those individuals with a historic connection to slavery, as well as those students committed to serving in communities with a historic connection to slavery.
- e. Establish Student Success Programs for multidisciplinary subjects, with a focus on STEM/H and education fields.
- f. Explore ways to collaborate with current VCU initiatives focused on engaging Richmond Public School students.
- g. Introduce an annual Gabriel Scholars ball to support the scholarship development strategy.

The supporting strategies are:

- a. Develop a framework for the scholarship criteria.
- b. Create a welcoming and affirming climate for Gabriel Scholars.
- c. Establish programs and extracurricular activities that will include community-based service-learning activities for Gabriel scholars.
- d. Establish a cross-campus, cross-sector Gabriel Scholars integrative, advisory structure.

III. Community-Based Economic Development Programs for Individuals and Communities

The recommendations and supporting strategies are:

- a. Provide opportunities for youth focused on college and career readiness.
 - i. Provide summer internships for high school juniors and rising seniors.
 - ii. Increase awareness of scholarships.
 - iii. Provide career support for VCU students, even after graduation.
 - iv. Introduce career opportunities at VCU Health and VCU.
 - v. Address support services for VCU students that create barriers to employment.
 - vi. Expand programs for students who are college bound that introduce education and pathways focused on STEM/H.
 - vii. Provide information regarding entrepreneurship and how to start a business.
- b. Design programs that increase academic success for students attending nonaccredited schools in the Greater Richmond area, with a focus on Richmond Public Schools.
 - i. Provide/expand mentorship programs for K-12 students and communicate opportunities to parents/guardians.
 - ii. Provide education and pathways focused on STEM/H.
 - iii. Increase outreach, awareness, and communications regarding programs and events happening at VCU.
 - iv. Coordinate activities with VCU entities to host Summer Enrichment programs.
 - v. Host information sessions on how to apply for college that includes students and parents/guardians.
- c. Establish a strategic partnership between VCU and Richmond Public Schools (RPS).
 - i. Identify alignment between RPS's and VCU's strategic goals to create impact.
- d. Create inclusive and accessible skill-building educational modules for community members that can be supported by various units across VCU and empower the community.
 - i. Map existing "micro-credentialing" opportunities at VCU and regional partners available to the community.
 - ii. Establish a "micro-credentialing" strategy including regional partnerships, to help meet regional workforce and entrepreneurship needs.
 - iii. Launch a "Summer Boot Camp" that combines several topics each year based upon ideas gathered from the community.
 - iv. Establish a "VCU Mobile" approach that utilizes partnerships with community organizations to address access barriers faced by community members.

- e. Enhance the small minority business development community ecosystem to ensure that it thrives.
 - i. Examine the VCU procurement policies to assist vendors in successfully navigating the process.
 - ii. Engage with community partners that are focused on small minority business development.
 - iii. Identify opportunities throughout VCU to support small businesses.
 - iv. Identify and address known “barriers.”
 - v. Intentionally create social capital for SWaM (Small, Women-owned or Minority-owned) businesses that have been certified through the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- f. Build a VCU “connector” model that enhances partnerships with community organizations and community colleges to support workforce development and capacity needs of community residents and businesses.
 - i. Build and/or expand partnerships with community colleges, trade schools, and organizations that focus on credentials and certifications.
 - ii. Support initiatives that focus on workforce development for individuals who have historically encountered barriers as a result of incarceration, recovery from addiction or homelessness.
 - iii. Establish programs that focus on capacity building for small businesses.
- g. Work with community partners to establish “hub” models that address community-identified needs.
 - i. Establish health and wellness hubs.
 - ii. Develop research hubs to engage community residents in research programs.
 - iii. Explore a hub that focuses on healthy foods and nutrition.
- h. Address community grand challenges through vertically integrated projects and team-based approaches that prioritize community input and measure outcomes.
 - i. Decrease crime/gun violence, food deserts, alcohol sales.
 - ii. Address community Mental Health challenges and digital divides.
 - iii. Develop a robust SWaM program in collaboration with Richmond City vendors.
 - iv. Tell the history of the organization through an initiative in collaboration with community partners.
- i. Leverage VCU’s youth and family-related resources to mobilize efforts with community partners to create strong youth development and family support opportunities.
 - i. Enhance partnerships with community organizations and programs to build additional capacity that supports youth and adults.
 - ii. Establish/revive intentional partnerships with specific communities, notably Carver Elementary School and the JXN Project.
 - iii. Create early childhood intervention/mentorship models to improve access to early childhood education.

In addition to the recommendations outlined to support the State legislation, the Commission has identified several critical activities that need to be enacted to support Project Gabriel going forward.

Following are governance and communications recommendations:

1. Provide resources to support the management and coordination of the Project Gabriel recommendations.
 - a. Identify a Senior Leader and Project Manager in the VCU President's office to oversee and coordinate the project activities.
 - b. Provide appropriate administrative support and resources for the project.
2. Establish a Project Gabriel governance structure to ensure implementation of the recommendations.
 - a. Establish a committee that will be led by the VCU Senior Leader and supported by the Project Manager that includes all responsible VCU/VCU Health entities and invited community advisors.
3. Launch a Communications Plan to share updates regarding Project Gabriel's progress.
 - a. Implement a communications plan.
 - b. Redesign the Project Gabriel website.

Summary: An UNCOMMON Story for UNCOMMON Times

The story of Project Gabriel is not just about historical reckoning. It is about...

- Weaving together the uncommon pieces of our past and present;
- Embracing our identity as an institution with 180 years of both positive and negative history;
- Acknowledging where there is the need for reconciliation and committing to doing better.

These recommendations signify VCU's commitment to reconciliation, community engagement, and the betterment of the university as an institution and a national model.

The Project Gabriel Commission requests that the VCU Board of Visitors receive the recommendations in the report and direct VCU's administration to review and consider the Commission's recommendations and strategies with all deliberate speed in light of potential legislative changes, resource availability, operational plans, and guidance from legal counsel. The Board of Visitors will receive an annual update from VCU's administration on the progress.

Acknowledgments

In recognition of the culmination of Project Gabriel, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to all of those who have played instrumental roles in shaping its mission. We offer profound gratitude to the engaged community members whose active participation in forums and invaluable insights have been foundational to the project's resounding success. The dedicated Commission and Work group members, in their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts, have been the pillars supporting the project's achievements.

A special "Thank You" is extended to the organizations that agreed to host the community forums, including Richmond Public Schools and the staff of the Martin Luther King Middle School, Pastor Ralph Hodge and the congregation of Second Baptist Church of South Richmond, and Pastor and Dr. Earl Brown and the congregation of Fifth Baptist Church in Richmond.

We also are grateful for the tireless support of the countless volunteers and VCU team members who worked to support the entire Project Gabriel initiative and maintain communications throughout the process. This project would have not been possible without the assistance of Jonsette Calloway, Verenda Cobbs, Matt Conrad, Miles Gordon, Cindy Martin, Amy Kelley, Abigayle Davey, and Taron James.

The outstanding work of Ms. Bonnie Newman Davis as writer and editor is reflected throughout this report. Her technical expertise and guidance are greatly appreciated.

We are especially grateful for the outstanding leadership and dedication of Co-Chairs Dr. Clifton Peay and Sheryl Garland, whose guidance has steered the project toward its current heights. Additionally, our appreciation extends to the supportive staff members, our university, health system, and community partners, as well as the experts and historians who generously shared their expertise and insights, including Dr. Peter J. Wosh, Elvatrice Belsches, and Dr. Jody Lynn Allen and Dr. Fanchon Glover.

The visionary leadership of President Michael Rao in establishing this commission underscores his steadfast commitment to driving meaningful change. His unwavering dedication and support, combined with the collective efforts of all involved, have been indispensable to the project's success. As Project Gabriel embarks on its journey forward, we eagerly anticipate continued collaboration, forging a more inclusive and resilient future together.

With heartfelt gratitude,

The Project Gabriel Commission