

Project Gabriel - President's Special Commission on Slavery and Justice

Minutes

Date: April 27, 2023

Duration: 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Dr. Clifton Peay (Chair), Sheryl Garland (Chair), Dr. Faye Belgrave, Rhonda Pleasants, Dr. Ed Ayers, Leonard Edloe, Maya Johnson, Yvonne Brandon, Dr. Kevin Harris, Matt Conrad, Veranda Cobbs, Cindy Martin

Guests: Magnus Johnsson , Samantha Marrs

Charge: Based on the findings of the December 17, 2022 report on Slavery and the Medical College of Virginia, this Commission is charged with recommending to the Administration and Board of Visitors of VCU specific ways in which the institution should:

- (i) memorialize all enslaved individuals who labored on MCV grounds and property; and*
- (ii) provide 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.*

Discussion/Updates

- Opening remarks - Dr. Peay and Ms. Garland welcomed the group and thanked them for their contributions and work to date.
- The minutes of [April 20](#) Commission meeting were approved without comment.
- Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA Report - Mr. Conrad shared that he and Ms. Cobbs recently connected with the leaders of the Descendants of Enslaved Communities (DEC) at UVA to learn from their process and experience. DEC stressed the importance of engaging the faith community as this Commission recently committed to addressing. They also strongly encouraged this group to engage a genealogist to identify descendants. Ms. Cobbs shared that DEC was open to engaging with Project Gabriel and offering their support. They also reminded the group to be intentional in connection with those with oral histories who can inform our processes xx. Mr. Conrad and Ms. Cobbs will circulate their notes from the sf.
- Report Outs from Working Groups
- Dr. Belgrave and Mr. Edloe shared the [Memorialization subcommittee'scccoo findings](#) .

- Dr. Ayers remarked that the First African Baptist Church is contemporaneous with MCV. At a time when Black people in the city were taking control of their lives, it was the largest building in the city. It's location adjacent to the Shockoe Bottom district which is to be converted into a large memorial to the domestic slave trade is both symbolic and functional. Proximity will drive attendance.
- Ms. Pleasants reiterated the importance of collaboration with the Well Project. The projects coexist and may be codependent. The two could come together for the common good and utilize the First African Baptist Church to serve both purposes.
- Ms. Garland seconds this notion and asserts that revitalizing the FABC space would be meaningful and impactful. She notes that each of the health sciences departments have orientation programs and work has been underway for over a year to integrate telling the story of MCV and this would be a space on campus for students to feel the history. It's a powerful setting for education.
- Dr. Peay asked the Development team if there are restrictions on corporate donations. Ms. Marrs responded that the primary restriction is that VCUHS doesn't accept funding from tobacco product companies and that the Board of Visitors must approve any named structures.
- Dr. Harris walked through the [Scholarship working group's recommendations](#).
- There was an acknowledgement that the number of RPS students who enroll at VCU is lower than the number VCU would like. One recommendation from the group is a meeting with RPS to encourage increasing the number of students who take Algebra in middle school in order to increase the Advanced diploma opportunities.
- Ms. Marrs referenced the RTP, a new VCU initiative in local high schools which could be an opportunity to wrap in Project Gabriel and increase the RPS to VCU pipeline.
- Dr. Peay cautioned the group not to strive for the floor, but to commit to an adequate supply of scholarships for minority students in our health professions schools. Be bold in this moment and address the issue of low minority enrollment in these areas.
- Running short on time, Ms. Garland shared the work of the [Community and Individual Programs working group](#).
- The primary recommendations focused on building stronger partnerships with community organizations to enhance small business development, address community-identified issues, and engaging families and youth.
- Ms. Cobbs reminded the group that at every stage of our process we should be asking if the proper constituencies are engaged. For example have we heard from students on the scholarships initiatives? Have we spoken with the community regarding our community program suggestions?
- Dr. Peay and Ms. Garland will present these learnings to President Rao on Monday.

NEXT MEETINGS:

Commission Meeting May 4th 4:30pm-6:00pm

Action

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Next steps

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