

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

## Agenda

May 25, 2023

Duration: 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Sheryl Garland, Dr. Yvonne Brandon, Dr. Faye Belgrave, Magnus Johnsson, Rhonda Keyes Pleasants, Dr. Clifton Peay, Dr. Leonard Edloe, Jonsette Calloway, Dr. Laurant Lee, Dr. Kevin Harris

**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

- Approval of [May 4 meeting minutes](#) (2 min.)
  - Minutes approved
- **Update on BOV Presentation (5 min.)**
  - (Garland) Overview of recommendations was presented to BOV as preliminary. From her perspective, there was very little feedback, but general consensus that we were moving in right direction. Feedback from one board member and Pres. Rao was supportive and they are looking forward to bringing back the final recommendations.
    - Thanked Dr. Peay for laying groundwork for projet and presenting a compelling case on why it's important to think about memorialization with FABC and collaborating with EMSWP.
    - The co-chairs left the group with next steps; made it clear that we are not done; presented on the heels of a charged dicussion around tuition increase, and they were clear that recommendations cannot tap into state funds or tuition dollars; shared there is additional work to be done with the community on prioritizing, implementation, and costs and will return in September to present detailed plans with final recommendations.

- (Dr. Peay) Received email from Dr. Rao who was pleased with the Commission's work and wanted to thank the Commission. Many members spoke to him privately; a reporter in Bunyon was recommended;
- Dr. Peay had a conference call with a Harvard leadership group. JP Morgan has a project working with racial equity and committed 30 billion dollars to similar projects to focus on housing, workforce diversity, financial literacy that may prove beneficial. OneGoal (Ariel Capitol) is working to improve financial literacy (was recommended from a member)
- **Discussion on next steps/review of [work plan](#) (45 min.)**
  - S. Garland recapped the remaining steps in the work plan
  - **Forums**
    - Jonsette provided an update on forum planning details
      - We are looking to host two in-person events at the end of June and want to make sure the forums are accessible and representative of the greater community.
      - Some ideas that were suggested include leveraging faith communities by hosting events in church settings, such as Sixth Mt. Zion Church, Robinson Theater, Liberation Church, and the Police Training Center.
        - Potentially hosting on different parts of town—one downtown and one on southside. We want to ensure there is available parking and the venue is accessible via bus line.
      - Format includes having three different groups for each theme, allowing participants to choose the table that best aligns with their interests. Each group would have a dedicated recorder and facilitator. Guests will provide their thoughts and comments about the recommendations, utilizing the SOAR format (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results). They will also be asked how they think VCU could implement the recommendations. There would not be rotation, due to timing. We would still create an opportunity for guests to submit thoughts on other recommendations they did not visit.
      - Plan is to have a recommendations page on our website to solicit feedback online, with the same questions posed during the in-person events.
      - 6 p.m. to 8 p.m timeframe is ideal.
    - (Sheryl) Looking to engage RISC to help promote forums and invite individuals affiliated with organization to the events
    - (Dr. Harris) Another group is the Facts and Faith group that may provide added visibility
      - Conversation commenced about how we reach people within the VCU community who do not have the luxury to attend our events.

When developing the invitation link, target to VCUHS (FMD, food service, transportation); figure out how to target these individuals

- Happy to think through and determine strategy
- (S. Garland) Introduced Dr. Winn—he has goal of building Massey Cancer Center and the communities it serves and has done an exceptional job building outreach; one of his primary initiatives is engagement with faith-based communities, including partnering to launch Facts and Faith Fridays, which brings together churches from around the region, with a focus on educating the community on health, financial, economic issues and ensuring faith leaders have what they need in these areas.
- (Dr. Edloe) What are we doing state-wide?
  - Henrico/East End—how do we reach that group?
- (Dr. Peay) How far out do we go?
  - Dr. Edloe—There is connection in Henrico.
- (Dr. Lee) Agrees with reaching further out, with the possibility of reaching New Kent; slavery was not contained to one area; consider connections and networks that extend beyond the boundaries of Richmond.
  - Consider collaboration with Martin Luther King Commission (chaired by Jennifer McLullen) and has a statewide reach.
- (Dr. Peay) We are trying to find strategic locations; Gary Flowers is interested in hosting to talk about Project Gabriel on his radio show; would that be an option?
  - Commission agreed to the idea.
- Are there any recommendations for locations?
  - 2nd Baptist Church (Rev. Hodge) – Walmsley & Broad Rock
  - St. Pauls
  - First African Church (Northside)--parking may be an issue
  - Some consensus as far as south?
  - Ebenezer Church (Recommendation to speak with Gary Flowers since he is a member)
    - Associate pastor (Brenda Somerset) to contact
  - Fifth Baptist Church in West End (Dr. Brandon recommended)
    - (Dr. Belgrave) Breakouts don't have to be held in actual rooms versus breakout areas.
    - (J. Calloway) Matt and team will visit sites next week and report back to Commission if a need exists for additional options.
- (Dr. Belgrave) How many people do we want to target? People are not limited to the faith community.
  - We can probably anticipate the same turn out as MLK and could cut off registration; would want to talk to pastor about these details.

- (Dr. Brandon) Will ask her pastor's thoughts about hosting an event at Fifth Baptist.
- Communications moving forward will be via email.
- (Dr. Peay) Comments from Magnus & Rhonda?
  - (R. Keyes Pleasants) She is encouraged by the locations chosen; would really be thoughtful to ensure we reach different parts of the city (First Baptist South Richmond) and be mindful of the fact that churches may not be open for meetings and forums. We are on the right track and is encouraged by the discussion.
- (M. Johnsson) Looking forward to continuing the dialogue.
- (Dr. Belgrave) Should we have longer meetings as we begin to think about implementation? Would it make sense to get people together for a half-day meeting or continue to meet weekly?
  - (Dr. Peay) It's something we can give thought to.
  - (S. Garland) One idea we may want to consider is to reconvene smaller work groups when thinking about the implementation plan, how to operationalize recommendations, and how to develop costs, timelines. Agreed that it will require some intensive work

## Action

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## Next steps

- Inform Commission of forum progress