

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

## Minutes

August 10, 2023

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

Platform: Zoom

Attendees: Bonnie Newman Davis, Sheryl Garland, Magnus Johnsson, Rhonda Keyes Pleasants, Matt Conrad, Dr. Faye Belgrave, Dr. Leonard Edloe, Dr. Clifton Peay, Dr. Kevin Harris, Dr. Laurant Lee, Jonsette Calloway

**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 [June 15 meeting minutes](#)
- Introduction of Bonnie Newman Davis
- Status of workgroup progress was discussed.
  - Memorialization (Dr. Belgrave)
    - Workgroup has met three times, with one final meeting next week
    - Established three subcommittees to focus on each recommendation
    - Each group is working to operationalize and provide fine-tuning to the broad recommendations, especially in regard to the first recommendation.
      - Making further recommendations around First African Baptist Church (FABC) feasibility; renovations will be determined by the functionality, which is another group's focus
      - There is a strong need to do a full feasibility study
      - Other discussions have taken place around FABC ownership
      - Collaboration with EMSWP Family Resource Council—want to use this project as an opportunity to close some of the FRC recommendations
      - Functionality—focused on the cultural, educational, usage of the space (paired with FRC recommendations)

- Dr. Edloe—It will be a long-term effort when it comes to the building; it has been inspiring to think about “what can be” for the space.
- Dr. Belgrave—Pre-planning study would be long-term, whereas recommendations from FRC may be longer term.
- M. Johnsson—Dr. Carmen Foster provided great insight on positioning the project for those in and outside of Richmond.
  - B. Martin—Valentine Museum is doing additional research related to medical findings; current findings should be incorporated into mission.
  - Dr. Belgrave—We see the long term objectives as intersectional and additional findings can augment each other.
  - M. Conrad—EMSWP has been stood up to reconcile MCV and the remains; Gabriel Proj. could expand beyond to include this; would Gabriel recommendations be a part of EMSWP or usurping their process and scope?
    - Dr. Belgrave—FRC developed recommendations to be part of the larger group of recommendations.
    - R. Keyes Pleasants—FRC was formed prior to HB1980 and goes back a few years; would not be usurping either one’s thought process, but all decisions are to be considered collaborative and a meeting point between both groups because in some regard, the recommendations are very similar.
      - M. Conrad—Interested in knowing what that collaboration looks like
      - R. Keyes Pleasants—FRC is very interested and supportive of the FABC renovation and using the area for reflection, contemplation, education, and recently adended recommendations to be more specific around this.
        - Expressed strong interest in using FABC.
  - Dr. Peay—He and Sheryl had a conference call with the FABC pastor who strongly supports the plans for renovation; there is no separate agenda.
  - S. Garland—One of the ideas presented was to pursue a black church preservation grant; Development and Alumni Relations team did their due diligence to research this; a decision was made not to pursue at this time due to concerns with approval process and additional details around the building’s usage; there is a recommendation to look at this opportunity in the future.
- Scholarships (Dr. Harris)
  - Dr. Harris—Had discussion with the scholarship workgroup to remind them of what’s at stake.

- Group did homework prior to meeting; felt comfortable identifying a scholarship framework and reviewed funding to put together a sustained effort
  - Group is using the time to think through options to determine the best direction to proceed, considering all parameters/concerns, etc.; opportunity to think about how they can strengthen certain efforts
  - Workgroup was advised to explore options for funding, to be included in final report
- Community Programs for Individuals (S. Garland)
  - Dr. Douglas-Glenn and Sheryl will meet in late August to share findings from both workgroups
  - Removed “underperforming schools” from language
  - Workgroup wanted to know how many parents, students impacted were at the forums and recommended securing additional feedback
  - Group is crosswalking what youth said and what came from the forums to develop the operational plan
  - N. Bailey recommended a meeting with the RPS Superintendent
  - Discovered VCU and community partners are already engaged; next step is to reach out to partners
    - Dr. Belgrave—offered to be used as a resource for partnerships
    - M. Conrad—offered to be a bridge for RPS
- S. Garland—Additional recommendations that should come out of the steering committee: how Proj. Gabriel will be going forward, a communications plan, organizational structure; need language around these ideas for the final report.
  - Question regarding timeline
    - Submitting recommendations to S. Garland and Dr. Peay by Aug. 21
    - B. Newman Davis to have draft report by Sept. 1-5, with a final report by Sept. 8
      - Ideally, the steering committee will review; J. Calloway to place in Google Docs.
      - Will ask Dr. Higginbotham to review

## Action

- Co-chairs to submit recommendations by Aug. 21

## Next steps

- Workgroup co-chairs to continue development of operational plans
- Commission to think on ideas around Gabriel’s organizational structure