

November 6, Ordinary 32C (Haggai 1:15b-2:9)

My church is located in the first municipality in the country with a public reparations fund.

by [Kat Banakis](#) in the [November 2022](#) issue

The prophet Haggai has no patience for nostalgia. The people long for a previous temple, “this house in its former glory.” The elders, maybe even Haggai himself, recall the complexity of what the previous version really was—but the people remember it as better than that, as people will.

God lets them dwell there for a hot second, with perhaps a little sepia tone, and then tells the people to take courage: better things are coming. God is with them, just as God was with them coming out of Egypt. Do not fear.

I long for the past when it comes to some things. Guns, for instance. I wish that angry, isolated people—mostly young, White, and male—didn’t have access to them. Unswirling the jam from the oatmeal on that one is going to be hard, but we can do it. We’ve got to. I was on a call just recently when we had to pause because a 13-year-old had been shot a block away while playing in her backyard.

I don’t wish for an earlier time when it comes to gender, religious affiliation, or race. I’m a White woman serving a suburban church in a predominantly White denomination. As Willie Jennings and others have pointed out, colonialism and Christianity have been so intertwined that it’s hard to parse them out. But it’s high time we did. It is grace to live in a moment when White Christians can hear the sins of aggression and omission that White Christians have inflicted upon our brethren. What a privilege to walk with my congregation as we learn about why our neighborhood is so White (redlining) and why all of the synagogues are on the south side of town (Jewish people once were not allowed north of a specific street).

I’m lucky to serve a church in a community with an incredible interfaith community, one that came together only in recent years. There were pastors’ networks for a while, but operating in an interfaith mode is newer, and it’s a joy. I hasten to add

that the interfaith network is mostly (though not exclusively) light-skinned.

This church is also located in the first municipality in the country with a public reparations fund (paid for with cannabis taxes); there is also a separate private fund for people to contribute to. In both cases the money will go to the community of African descent as determined by that community. It isn't perfect. There is absolutely no way that what can be done at a local public-private level can compensate for centuries of harm and lost wealth. And there is ample disagreement within the community of African descent.

But it's a start. And in June, 17 local religious communities—Christian of all stripes, Jewish, Buddhist, Quaker, Baha'i—came together to sign a pledge to contribute to reparations. The document lists four points for us to commit to:

- Reparations for Black Americans involves “more than financial compensation”; it's about the ongoing work of repairing the wide-ranging damage that racism has done. Religious leaders have “a responsibility to lead in this area.”
- “Educate our community about the history of racism,” both nationally and locally. This includes working together to create shared educational programs.
- “Educate our community about local reparations efforts” as well.
- “Raise money to support reparations efforts.”

In January we'll see how much money we've raised. I've challenged my congregation to raise \$60,000—our share, in 2022 dollars, of the reparations money James Forman demanded from White congregations when he stormed the pulpit of Riverside Church in 1969.

Our list of committed congregations is growing by the day, which is great. But these financial contributions are table stakes, a good-faith apology for the sins of the past and present. Next comes the deeper work of relationship and community building across racial lines. We do this work not knowing what will come but hoping that God will fill our houses of worship with splendor that “shall be greater than the former.” I'll let you know how it goes.