

Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia
Service of Repentance, Reconciliation & Healing
November 2, 2013 at Christ & St. Luke's, Norfolk

Formal Apology on Behalf of the Diocese of Southern Virginia

The Rt. Rev. Herman Hollerith, IV

Dear People of God,

Today we have come together as the Church to exercise our highest calling as followers of Jesus Christ – that of reconciliation. We have come together as a diocesan family to seek reconciliation for the wrongs and injustices of our historical past as embodied in the institution of slavery.

Despite what some may say, what we do today is *not* grounded in modern politics or social ideology. What we do today is grounded in nothing less than Jesus' commandment to "love one another." Set within the context of our common liturgy, we seek to move from confession, to contrition, to restoration of relationships, and finally, communion together at our Lord's Table. We recognize that this service is only a beginning, but even so, offer it with the hope that our actions will play some part in the struggle to eradicate racism and prejudice in our common life.

If reconciliation is to take place there must first be truth telling. It is not enough to think that because we in our generation have not condoned the institution of slavery that we are immune to its evil or exempt from its stain upon today's society. As mature Christians we take seriously the notion of inherited sin. We take seriously the truth that the spiritual DNA which we have received includes the bad choices of our forbearers. We acknowledge that as white people in particular, the freedoms and economic prosperity we enjoy today was in great portion built upon the backs of those who suffered the chains of bondage in the first two centuries of our country's making. All of us are - as Americans and geographic Southerners in particular, corporate recipients of the fruits of that terrible time!

As Anglicans we believe in the power of corporate confession. We believe that sin is always much larger and much more complicated than simply what we do or don't do as individuals. We therefore confess corporately in our worship and seek forgiveness as an historical community – for those things done and left undone – in the past and in the present.

As far as I know there has been heretofore no occasion when the Episcopal Church in Southern Virginia has *ever* apologized publicly for its role in promoting and sustaining either slavery or segregation. Spiritual common sense would suggest that a community of faith cannot move forward in its common life in Christ until it has first confessed its

wrongdoing. The Peace that we exchange in our worship becomes little more than an idle greeting until first the “knee of the heart” is bent.

Therefore, as your Bishop, I address my African-American brothers and sisters, and on behalf of the churches in Southern Virginia, I acknowledge and ask your forgiveness and God’s, for our sins.

.....for the way the Church remained blind to the evil of slavery while using it to build our churches and to maintain white privilege.

.....for the cruelty, brutality and inhumane treatment of your forebears that we promoted or failed to stand against by “standing for the Way and the Truth and the Life”.

.....for our silence or complicity in supporting segregation and the unequal treatment of Black Americans after slavery was abolished.

.....for our forgetfulness and short memories and our resistance to understanding and responding to the cruel impact of racism in our present culture.

.....for our refusal to grasp that so long as we limit one another because of skin color the corrosive legacy of slavery will remain and prevent us from being the blessed body of Jesus – the living beacon of hope - that we are called to be.

My brothers and sisters, I ask God to give our Church a true repentance so that we might be reconciled to one another and renewed in our mission to live and proclaim the Gospel.

Therefore, I call upon our Church to strive for justice and equality within our own parishes - that the work we do here today might not be lost, but rather become a first step toward mending our broken world.

And may our Lord Jesus Christ be with us in all these things – give us the will to do them and the grace and power to perform them – until we are able finally to stand before the throne of God as one.