



Grace Note: Midweek Prayer Services Will Focus On Reparations

When 14-year-old Maria Murray arrived in Evanston in 1855, she became Evanston's only black resident. Maria arrived after being bought out of slavery by the Vane family. She then worked for them as an indentured servant. The Vane family were members at First Church, where Mr. Vane taught Sunday School. Our church records show that Maria Murray was enrolled in a membership class. In 1868, she married George Robinson and in 1882, at the age of 41, Maria, along with George and twenty other fellow black Evanstonians (among them the Garnett family, who owned a boot-making company, and the Day family, who owned a carpeting business), founded Second Baptist Church.

Our First Church Story is deeply enmeshed with Evanston's story. Frances Willard, a prominent member of First Church, would often declare, "When I get to Heaven, register me from Evanston!" There is no escaping our shared story, especially after viewing this ABC News segment, featuring Evanston as the 1st US city ["to address the impact of segregation and Black disenfranchisement"](#).

For Evanston, the first step that reparations will take is a \$25,000 benefit for housing. First Church should be celebrating, because reparations have been a United Methodist agenda since 1996. [The 2004 General Conference revised the 1996 General Conference action and resolved to support reparations.](#) At that General Conference, no one threatened to leave the United Methodist Church because of reparations. On the other hand, hardly anyone spoke about the denomination's support of reparations in the local church. It has been seventeen years and we still have the unfinished business of reparations on the eve of the United Methodist split because of who is allowed to love whom, and who is allowed to be called by God. While some say reparations are a daunting task, First Church is fortunate to have a structure already in place, and we can support with the gesture of a \$25,000 check to the city of Evanston. Perhaps it would be a way to reflect on the memory of Maria Murphy and the Vane family...

The Stewardship Committee talked about reparations back in August 2020, and wondered about encouraging the congregation to contribute over and above the operating budget for a donation to the city's reparations fund. However, without in-person gathering, the Operating Budget proved to be a challenge on its own. So the committee suggested finding a way to draw attention to reparations during the season of lent. Committee members wanted to give the congregation an opportunity to support the effort. The plan thus far has been:

1. To open a dedicated account called The Reparations Fund with a goal to raise \$25,000 for the City of Evanston's Reparation Fund. **This account is open.**
2. To begin a Mid-week Lenten prayer service on Fridays at 1 pm, focusing on reparational education and awareness. This service will also provide an ongoing opportunity to make monetary gifts to the "Reparations Fund". **This action will begin on Friday, March 5th.**
3. With the approval of the Church Council, to dedicate the special 2021 Easter Offering to boost the Church's Reparations Fund towards the \$25,000 goal. We

encourage everyone to give an extra check written to First Church with the memo "Reparations".

Lenten services begin on Friday and I am thankful for Matt Johnson, who will offer a witness each week. I would very much welcome you to participate by tuning in and/or by offering to record the reading of scripture, the prayers, or the Welcome. We will premier at 1:00 pm on Fridays, on Facebook and YouTube, in the same manner as our Sunday worship services.

On the journey together,

Pastor Grace

Contact

First United Methodist Church
516 Church St.
847-864-6181
www.faithatfirst.com

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First United Methodist Church, 516 Church St, Evanston, IL 60201

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