

Renewal and Reconciliation: The Codrington project

A statement from USPG

Summary

Between 1712 and 1838ⁱ, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) owned and managed the Codrington Estates and exploited the labour of enslaved persons of African descent. As those with corporate responsibility for the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG), the successor organization to SPG, the Trustees and General Secretary fully acknowledge the Society's historic participation, as a voluntary society created by a Royal Charter and in which leading members of the Church of England were actively involved in the racialised system of chattel slavery. This participation clearly involved activities now recognised as crimes against humanity.

USPG is committed to telling the whole truth about the past; apologising for and repenting of this history and expressing deep remorse for the Society's actions, for the historic damage and also the intergenerational legacies. USPG commits to working in close partnership with the Codrington Trust, as the Governing Body of the Codrington estate and College. The Codrington Trust advanced proposals for a programme of reparatory activities and an investment of 18M BDS (£7M sterling) over a period of 10 -15 years. This was accepted, without objection, by USPG. This work will include engagement in academic research into the extent of the Estates legacy and revenues earned by USPG over the period of enslavement and emancipation, a programme of activities including locating enslaved burial sites, identifying and working with the community of descendants, providing an educational centre and working to improve the circumstances of the the qualified tenantsⁱⁱ and residents on the Estate.

Reparatory Justice

USPG understands reparatory justice to be complex and multi-dimensional, speaking to issues of human identity and social and cultural history, as well as politics and economics. At its heart, reparatory justice seeks to make amends for past wrongs and to provide redress for the physical, material and moral damage inflicted on individuals, groups and nations. Focussed on reconciliation, truth and justice, it involves moral action. On the one hand, this involves sincere and formal apologies and the acknowledgement of past crimes, and on the other, a commitment to the renewal and reconciliation of relationships wounded by this history – supported by programmes of activities that improve the lives of those individuals and communities who continue to suffer from the wide-ranging legacies of chattel slavery.

Reparatory justice seeks to align itself with the broad approach and understanding of reparations outlined by the CARICOM Reparations Commission.ⁱⁱⁱ It fully acknowledges that no programme of reparatory justice could possibly compensate for the harm and injustices suffered during the period of plantation slavery ('the Barbarity times'^{iv}) and the enduring legacies. Confronting the truth, public acknowledgement and the proposed programme of reparatory action are intended to help repair and transform present systems and structures and make a contribution to the long-term work of moral and relational repair. In short, to open a door to a different future.

USPG acknowledges a distinction between formal Reparations and programmes of reparatory justice.^v The former involves commitments and payments between nation states; the later are programmes initiated by independent institutions (e.g. universities, churches) and individuals. Such programmes seek to address the material and moral injustices of the past in ways that reflect the historic harms inflicted by those institutions with the intention of building a better future. It is hoped that such programmes may serve as both models for Government action and raise awareness of the issues within the wider public.

Acknowledge and Accept

USPG acknowledges and accepts the following^{vi}:

1. That SPG, as an agent of the Church of the England, engaged in the forced labour of enslaved Africans and their descendants born on the Island of Barbados. At any one time, there were between 190 and 440^{vii} such persons working in the fields or other occupations as part of the industrial process of sugar production from which SPG realised profits. These profits supported its activities as a mission agency within Barbados and beyond. That during this period, it is likely that between 600 and 1,200 individuals lived and died as enslaved persons^{viii}, never experiencing their liberty.
2. That during the period 1712 to 1838, enslaved persons were routinely subjected to physical abuse and severe punishment, as part of the everyday management of the plantation. Slave traders and plantation owners often branded enslaved persons, and we know that between 1724 and 1732 (and possibly longer) persons on the Codrington estate were branded.^{ix}
3. That enslaved persons were routinely not provided with the appropriate levels of food, medical care and support, resulting in many deaths. That members of the SPG board, including bishops and clergy of the Church of England noted the high death rate but did not act effectively to ensure a change in conditions.
4. That from 1712 to 1761 SPG purchased at least 450 enslaved African persons providing direct support for the activities of slave-traders and the Transatlantic Slave trade. As such it was complicit in a trade that involved the deaths of African persons within Africa and during the Middle Passage, and the wars within and between African states, fuelled in part by trade in enslaved persons.
5. Throughout the period 1712 – 1838, SPG accepted slavery as biblically sanctioned. Whilst it advocated for the reform of some aspects of slavery, it did not challenge the legitimacy of holding slaves and instead repeatedly created and disseminated arguments that stressed the legality and morality of slaveholding. Through its actions it provided considerable moral and political legitimacy for the practice of slaveholding within the Caribbean and other British colonies, including those in North America.
6. That despite growing calls for the abolition of slavery in Britain from the 1780s, SPG persisted in arguing that slavery was legitimate until 1831, even then it argued that it should only be ended through a process of gradual emancipation.
7. That SPG as a mission agency shared in a pervasive set of theological and cultural ideas and practices developing within European culture that promoted both white superiority and a deeply embedded racism, as well as a rapacious form of highly extractive capitalism that treated human beings as livestock. That participation in these wider cultural, economic and political practices was profoundly damaging to the societies and persons of the Caribbean.

8. That through its activities at Codrington, SPG has passed on a tradition of Christian faith and identity that is deeply distorted, marked by its inhumane and disgraceful history of slavery. That this legacy constitutes as significant burden to the Church of the Province of the West Indies, one that it seeks to dismantle.

Apologise

As a Christian agency and part of the Anglican Communion, with historic roots in the Church of England, USPG wholeheartedly repents of and apologises for its active involvement in chattel slavery in the past and seeks to be held accountable to a more just future.

In acknowledging and apologising for its historic actions, USPG seek to recognise the breadth and extent of the direct harms caused and their harmful legacies . In particular, it recognises a moral accountability to the following groups of individuals and institutions and seeks to take steps to repair and restore these relationships:

First, to those individuals who were enslaved at Codrington, who lived, worked and died under the most appalling and degrading conditions and died without receiving their freedom. We acknowledge a responsibility to honour their memory and will seek to do so through work that identifies the sites of their graves and memorialises these individuals.

Second, to the community of those who are descendants of those persons enslaved at Codrington, we acknowledge the harm done to their ancestors and the intergenerational legacies of harm that have flowed from the brutal system of the plantations. We acknowledge a responsibility to assist individuals to learn more of their ancestry, through familial research and through a thorough presentation of the history of Codrington. In addition, we acknowledge a responsibility to the tenants and residents who are living on the Codrington Estates and will seek to improve their circumstances and standards by assisting them in acquiring freehold lots, improvements of infrastructure as well as providing educational and economic opportunities.

Third, we acknowledge the harm done to the life and witness of the Anglican Church within the Caribbean and beyond, and in particular to Codrington College as a site of Christian formation and of theological education and learning; to the Diocese of Barbados; and, to the Church of the Province of the West Indies. Namely, that the context in which the Christian faith within Barbados through Codrington College was transmitted, and the associated practices and patterns of thinking, run so counter to the very essence of the Christian gospel and Jesus's simple command to love God and our neighbour as ourselves, that they should be considered deeply un-Christian or anti-Christian, blasphemous and heretical. To further acknowledge that this inheritance has hindered the proclamation of the Gospel as a source of liberation and continues to inhibit the mission and ministry of the Church.

Fourth, we acknowledge that the example of the Codrington estate as a plantation run by a Christian mission agency provided powerful symbolic and rhetorical support for the legitimacy of slavery more widely within Barbados and the Caribbean. We acknowledge a responsibility to be engaged in a public act of remorse and apology and a commitment to making amends through educational and other initiatives that have a wider public benefit and, in line with the

Church of the Province of the West Indies, we support the broader case for reparations within the Caribbean.^x

Act

Over the course of the Project, we will engage in a range of research and programming activities that will seek to meet the following project objectives:

- a. Conduct research to locate the burial and habitation places of enslaved persons who worked on the Codrington estates throughout its history, document the findings, and establish monuments to memorialize those persons, connect kinship and family groups, and recognise those areas as sacred spaces.
- b. Engage in academic work to record and present the full story of the Estates over the period of enslavement and emancipation to build a facility to house artefacts, narratives, and other materials to highlight through various media the enslaved experience and ensure that this tragedy is never forgotten.
- c. Undertake to improve the circumstances and standards of qualified tenants who are living on the Estates, providing new facilities for leisure and community activities, and assisting them in acquiring freehold lots in accordance with the Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act and considerations of proper infrastructure and Public Policy, as outlined in the Constitution of Barbados.
- d. Fuel the spirit of self-reliance, enterprise/entrepreneurship among residents of the tenancies and wider community on island, especially the youth in St. John, by providing scholarships and other opportunities to assist them to develop and utilize the benefits of our heritage and ancestral legacy. Such endeavours are to be pursued in a co-community practice model which has at its core both the buy-in and recommendations of the community.
- e. Nurture a culture of theological enquiry and ministerial formation within Codrington College that engages critically and creatively with its history as a key institution within a Church, that legitimated both chattel slavery and the trade in enslaved persons. This will be achieved by the progressive development of its curriculum and the creation of courses that engage and influence contemporary theological research and writing around reparations within the Caribbean, but also internationally.

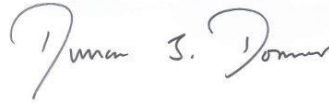
As a project, *Renewal and Reconciliation* seeks to be a learning process for all those involved, conducted in a spirit of open-mindedness and constructive critical reflection and marked by transparency of principles and processes. Respect for human rights and the wellbeing of all participants will underpin all its activities.

It warmly welcomes the opportunity of working in close and mutual partnership with the Codrington Trust and expresses its profound gratitude to Codrington College, the Codrington Trust and the Church of the Province of the West Indies for its support and generous engagement with this work.

SIGNED



The Rt Revd Dr David Walker
Chair
26 August 2024



The Revd Dr Duncan Dormor
General Secretary

This updates an earlier statement originally agreed by USPG on 8 September 2023

ⁱ SPG/USPG continued to manage the Codrington Estate until 1983 when it was transferred by an Act of Parliament to the Codrington Trust. (<http://barbadosparliament-laws.com/en/showdoc/cs/244>). USPG dates from 1964 when SPG incorporated the Universities Mission to Central Africa. Although emancipation occurred in 1836, the transitional system of apprenticeship was only abolished by the various colonial assemblies in 1838, completing the process of emancipation.

ⁱⁱ Qualified in relation to the Tenancies Freehold Purchase Act, Law of Barbados.

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice/>

^{iv} See Hiliary Beckles, 2016, *The First Black Slave Society: Britain's "Barbarity Time" in Barbados, 1636-1876*, University of West Indies Press: Jamaica.

^v However, it should be noted that there a number of projects, which we would designate projects of reparatory justice that are described as 'Reparations work' in some contexts, e.g. within the US. For example that of Virginia Theological Seminary: [Reparations | Virginia Theological Seminary \(vts.edu\)](https://www.vts.edu/reparations). See Appendix 1 'A Sampling of Reparation Projects in the Episcopal Church' in Allen Shin and Larry Benfield (eds), 2022, *Realizing Beloved Community: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee*, The Episcopal Church: Church Publishing Incorporated.

^{vi} The information in this section is based on our current historical understanding. Some of these details may change as a result of further research.

^{vii} See especially: Travis Glasson, 2012, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World*, OUP; J. Harry Bennett, 1958, *Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and Apprenticeship on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados, 1710-1838*, University of California Press.

^{viii} This is an estimate using from Bennett (1958). The number of deaths is recorded for much, but not all of the period, 1712 – 1838.

^{ix} See Glasson, p 104.

^x Resolution 9 of the 39th Meeting of the Provincial Synod held in Barbados, November 2015. <https://www.anglicandioceseja.org/?p=4526>