



Racial Justice Strategy
2024 - 2025

BRISTOL CATHEDRAL



Party on the Green, summer 2022

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Please do not skateboard in this area

Introduction

In the past four years, Bristol Cathedral, its Chapter (Trustees) and congregation have sought to address the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement in the life of the Cathedral through research, education and engagement with both the historic abomination of the trafficking and enslavement of African people and the lived reality of racial injustice in our city today. Engagement with this part of the Cathedral's history did not begin with the toppling of the Colston statue or the death of George Floyd in 2020, but those events changed the tone and urgency of the engagement significantly.

The current Dean of Bristol was appointed in May 2020 and among the requirements for the role was “to address issues of diversity and inclusion” recognising that the Cathedral was not yet seen as a place of welcome for all, in particular that there were legacy issues to be faced around institutional racism in the church. These include the Cathedral's historic response to slavery and its abolition, as well as more recent responses to events such as the 2007 bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, the 2013 Festival of the Sea, and the ongoing annual Charter Day Service for the Society of Merchant Venturers.

While some of these events were well-meaning, they were widely criticised by the black community in the city, not least for their failure to address the long-term damage done to race relations in Bristol, and for the lack of an apology from the Church of England, or any other Bristol institution, for the way in which they had benefitted economically from individuals who were involved in the trafficking and exploitation of enslaved African people and the continuing lionisation of Edward Colston.

Following the death of George Floyd and the toppling of the Colston statue in Bristol, the Bishop of Bristol published a set of commitments to:

- Acknowledge and repent of the Church's past involvement in and benefit from transatlantic chattel enslavement.
- Challenge and address institutional racism within the church, listening to and learning from the experiences of people of global majority heritage.
- Recruit and support more clergy, staff and volunteers of global majority heritage.
- Make our churches truly welcoming to everyone, taking responsibility for the need for profound cultural change in our Church.
- Work with others in the Diocese of Bristol and the Church of England to bring these things about.

A note on language: The language in this strategy has been carefully chosen on the advice of the Cathedral Racial Justice Advisory Group. We recognise that many of the terms preferred here are contentious and that not everyone will favour the choices made. We also acknowledge that the use of language is constantly changing and aim to remain sensitive to that.



The Cathedral aspires to play its full part in the realisation of the Diocesan strategy. In preparing the ground, we have commissioned research into the historic benefits accrued to the Cathedral from individuals implicated in the economy of transatlantic chattel enslavement, engaged with African and African Caribbean Christians in the city of Bristol, and developed partnership with other Bristol institutions, including the Bristol Legacy Foundation, to ensure, as far as possible, that we are working in partnership and not in competition.



All God's Children Exhibition

Our research and engagement work has resulted in an exhibition, All God's Children, which tells the story of those who are memorialised in Bristol Cathedral and their links to the trafficking and exploitation of enslaved African people.

Between 1670 and 1900, roughly 1,000 people were buried or memorialised in the Cathedral and its grounds. Around 200 of them had a close connection to the economy of transatlantic chattel enslavement.

In this context when we say 'connection' we mean that someone or a close family member:

- Built, owned, worked on or invested in transatlantic chattel enslavement.
- Owned or exerted control over enslaved African people.
- Worked in the economy of transatlantic chattel enslavement as merchants, manufacturers, lawyers or bankers.
- Lived on the proceeds of that economy.
- Received government compensation for the emancipation of enslaved African people they owned, under the Slave Compensation Act of 1837.

The exhibition has been accompanied by a major education programme for children and young people. In addition, we have been in consultation with others about a longer term strategy to address issues of racial justice. We are indebted to those who have been in dialogue with us, whose lived experience has shaped our thinking and into whose hands we now entrust the scrutiny of our strategy and its implementation through our Racial Justice Advisory Group, whose members are noted at the end of this document.

Rationale

The Christian faith is founded on the belief in God who became incarnate, that is enfleshed, and lived a human life at a particular point in human history. This tells us that human life and history matter, and that the narrative of God is closely tied to the narrative of God's people.

Throughout history there have been movements of grace, where human creativity and ingenuity have enhanced the lives of others and relieved suffering. There have also been movements of sin, violence and depravity which have diminished the lives of all caught up in them.

The transatlantic chattel enslavement of African people is a systemic sin that stains our history, and which has perpetuated further sin through attitudes that have denigrated people of African and African Caribbean heritage and resulted in exclusion from all aspects of life, including the life of the Church. As an institution which is still predominantly led by white people, and predominantly enjoyed by white people, Bristol Cathedral recognises that much of what we have inherited in the building, its traditions and its modest wealth, has been built on funds amassed by the exploitation of people of global majority heritage.

We repent of the way in which the contribution of people of global majority heritage has been erased from our history. We note, for example, that images of the holy family in the Cathedral show Europeanised characters, not people of Middle Eastern heritage.

We acknowledge the many memorials in the Cathedral that honour and aggrandise individuals who amassed their wealth through the exploitation of enslaved African people and were then able to use that wealth to gain privilege and influence in the city of Bristol.

Scripture tells us that we are all God's children – sisters and brothers of Christ, and that in Christ there is no Greek or Jew, no slave or free. But this is not the story that is currently told in the fabric of Bristol Cathedral. The fabric of the building itself is a barrier to welcome and inclusion.

Christ died to reconcile the world to God and God to the world. We believe that we are called to share in that work of reconciliation. For all to feel welcome we must acknowledge the truth about the past and seek to address the challenges of the present. In acknowledging the past, we recognise not only historic injustice, cruelty and suffering, but also the intergenerational pain handed down to those of African and African Caribbean heritage in the present. We cry out and lament with our sisters and brothers, but we also acknowledge our own sin and complicity in excluding them from the story of the Cathedral and from its life.



Our approach to the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement is threefold: to tell the truth; to lament sin and suffering; to seek reconciliation and repair.

Aims

The aim of this strategy is to address historic issues of racial injustice in the life of Bristol Cathedral and to fold the work of racial justice into our wider vision and strategy.

In Bristol Cathedral we are committed to five purposes: to Follow Jesus; Welcome others; Transform communities; Worship God and to serve the Bishops and Diocese, living out our values of openness, generosity, creativity and bravery.

Making the Cathedral a place of welcome includes making it accessible to a wide diversity of people and proactively using our resources to overcome perceived and actual barriers to participation, whether as a visitor, worshipper, volunteer or staff member.

Transforming Communities includes addressing the historic injustice and systemic sin of racism, recognising the connection between the racism experienced by our sisters and brothers in Bristol today, the intergenerational trauma created by the transatlantic chattel enslavement of African people and the societal, financial and power dynamics reflected in that legacy as it is reflected in the fabric of the Cathedral building. In adopting this strategy we aspire to:

- Address the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement as it is reflected in the fabric of Bristol Cathedral by telling the truth about the past.
- Express our repentance for the institutional sin which has led to the suffering and trauma of our sisters and brothers both past and present.
- Work for reconciliation and partnership so that all people, but specifically those impacted by the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement, experience welcome and can participate in and influence the life of Bristol Cathedral in all its dimensions.
- Undertake actions that express a commitment to reparational justice by working with partners to address inequality in our city, in particular in addressing the injustice experienced by young people of African and African Caribbean heritage.

We commit to the following actions:

- 1. Partnership** - we will commit resources to working with partners in the City of Bristol to alleviate the impacts of long-term racial discrimination particularly within the African and African Caribbean communities, seeking projects that will enable us to learn and work in partnership for the flourishing of all.
- 2. Congregational Development** – continuing to work with the congregation to develop their understanding of the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement and historic and current racial injustice through a pattern of learning, prayer and action.
- 3. Worship and Liturgy** – we will begin to diversify our service offering to encourage people to be able to worship in ways that express their culture and lived experience, learning how we might shape forms of worship that meet the needs of the wider community. We will ensure that the traditions that we inherit (e.g. the Anglican choral tradition, liturgical forms of worship) are accessible to all and that young people encounter role models and champions who inspire and encourage them to consider how they might play a part in the church.
- 4. Governance Development** – ensuring effective and diverse representation in all levels of governance through the use of the Nominations Committee and networks across the city of Bristol and the Church of England. We will set aspirational goals for levels of membership of people of global majority heritage on Chapter, the Cathedral Advisory Group, and the Congregation Group that are representative of Bristol's population, within a defined time scale. This will include training to address issues of bias for Chapter members.
- 5. Staff Development** – using training to address all forms of bias, to ensure that staff are sensitive in their outward facing roles, their relationships with one another, and in recruitment processes, to the impact of racial discrimination in all its forms.
- 6. The Cathedral Building** – we will commission two major art works to express a) lament for the suffering of the past and hope for restoration and reconciliation and b) celebration of the contribution of people of African and African Caribbean heritage to the life of the City of Bristol – this may also be a work that interacts with/or is an intervention with the Colston window.
- 7. Welcome and Interpretation** – we will ensure that the truths that are told in the All God's Children Exhibition are mainstreamed into the interpretation of the building for all visitors, through physical interpretation, guide books and the scripts used by guides and welcomees.
- 8. Education** – we will build on our expertise in using the Cathedral building to educate children and young people about the role of the trafficking of enslaved African people in the life of the city of Bristol and the response of people of faith to racism in the present day. In our wider education programme, e.g. when sharing the Christian story with children, we will take care to make it clear that Jesus was not white and that Christians come from all parts of the globe.

Next Steps

Within the next twelve months we will produce an action plan to complete the following:

- Roll out training for staff, volunteers and trustees in addressing bias.
- Commission research into the legacy of transatlantic chattel enslavement in the Lord Mayor's Chapel.
- Review recruitment processes for all staff and voluntary roles and include in that review how/who we commission for freelance roles such as facilitation, temporary exhibitions, etc.
- Review our musical repertoire and establish a plan for diversifying it.
- Employ people or a team of global majority heritage (and lived experience of racism) to partner in delivering All God's Children learning workshops.
- Review and agree an overall Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging policy.
- Establish two Arts Commissioning Groups with a majority of members who are of global majority heritage.

Within the next two/three years we will:

- Appoint a new colleague to support partnerships in the city and undertake project work with those partners
- Plan for full cathedral interpretation including hearing diverse voices
- Agree the future of the Colston window and its permanent interpretation
- Create a fund to enable access and cover travel expenses to cover costs for AGC workshops and school visits from schools in underprivileged areas.

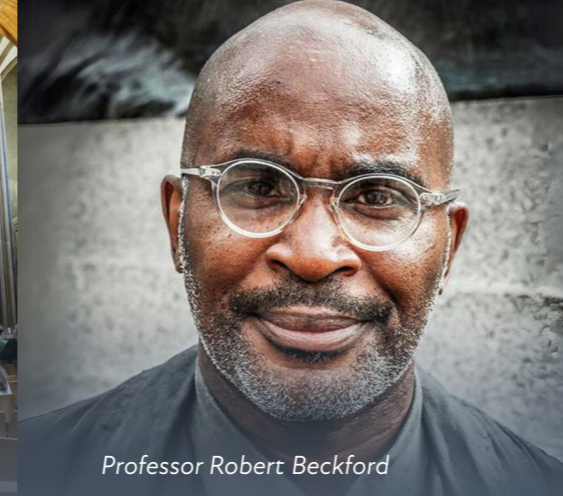


What we have done already...

Established an annual conference, The Beloved Community, to explore and celebrate diversity within the church.



Beloved Community Conference 2023



Professor Robert Beckford

Appointed Professor Robert Beckford and Edson Burton to Chair our arts commissioning groups.

Members of the Bristol Cathedral Racial Justice Advisory Group

Chair: Canon Roxanne Eversley Canon Librarian and Dean of Cultural Diversity at Southwark Cathedral

Rev Eric Adoo, Minister-in-charge, City Rd Baptist Church

Canon Derek Maddox, Vicar of Withywood and Hartcliffe

Ruth Pitter, Member of the Bristol Legacy Foundation

Rev Melanie Otto, Vicar of St Agnes, Bristol

Rev Fatima Sibanda, Chair Together4bristol

Pastor Osien Sibanda, Senior pastor of God's House International Centre Bristol

Worked with the descendants of John Isaac, an enslaved African man, to install a monument to him and those who suffered alongside him.



Clay memorial to someone who was enslaved, created by a year 5 student during an All God's Children workshop

Invited a range of people of global majority heritage to preach in the Cathedral



Party on the Green, summer 2022



Edson Burton © Claudio Alhers

Offered learning opportunities to the congregation including a study day with Azariah France Williams, author of Ghost Ship, showing the film After the Flood, and signposting the Blacklight course.




Piloted a series of workshops around All God's Children and evaluated them in partnership with the University of the West of England.



Outdoor photography exhibition as part of All God's Children, summer 2022

Carried out research and consultation resulting in the exhibition All God's Children



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”