

# The Disproportionate Impact of Covid-19 on Vulnerable Populations

## National Council of Churches/ National Council of Synagogues

June 4, 2020  
On-line meeting

### MINUTES

**Attendance:** NCS – Rabbi David Straus, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Lewis Eron, Rabbi A. Nathan Abramowitz, Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, Martin Budd, Dr. Adam Gregerman, Rabbi Leonard Gordon, Rabbi Steve Gutow, Rabbi Shira Lander, Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi Daniel Polish, Rabbi David Sandmel, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg, Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Allyson Zacharoff, Rabbi Harold Berman

**Attendance:** NCC – Rev. Dr. Donnie Anderson, Rev. Dr. Whit Bodman, Rev. Nicole Diroff, Rev. Dr. Darrell Jodock, Ms. Kathryn Lohre, Dr. Peter Makari, Rev. Dr. Al Moss, Ms. Laura Osbourne, Rev Mark Pettis, Rev. Margaret Rose, Ms. Maryl Walters, Dr. Tony Kireopoulos

**Guest:** Rev. Dr. Jennifer Harvey

### Opening

**Rabbi Harold Berman** opened the meeting with an invitation to those participating to identify themselves and say a few words about how the current Covid-19 situation is having an impact on their lives.

### Text Introductions

**Rabbi Steve Gutow** spoke of the concept of **Tikun Olam**, the challenge of making the world a better place, as understood in traditional and mystical texts and as a mandate in the modern world.

**Rev. Dr. Donnie Anderson** spoke of the sense of the Gospel that true change, desperately needed, involves selflessness and the willingness to pay a price for doing what is right. The best solutions may well not be in one's personal self-interest.

### Presentations

**Rev. Dr. Jennifer Harvey** spoke of the need for a radical shift in priorities from the idea of reconciliation to the need for reparations. She emphasized the importance of accepting each other for what we are, recognizing that whiteness and blackness offer very different experiences and very different perspectives. There is an overriding need for meaningful redistribution of resources and power. Reconciliation alone is insufficient

Discussion of reparations offers a way of making relationships more meaningful because true substance is involved. For example: the Covid-19 crisis inspires moves not only to offer medical care for all, but also to eradicate medical debt for those who are already encumbered.

Dr. Harvey recognized that most proposals have not led to action because discussion ends when an immediate crisis passes. The solution has to be based on reparations that involve long-term concerns and will extend themselves into the future.

**Rabbi Elyse Wechterman** reviewed the sense of Tikun as a fundamental concept and spoke of the verse: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) She spoke of the Jewish community’s internal concerns and external concerns.

Internal concerns involve recognition of the fact that not all Jews are white and the problem that many non-white Jews feel invisible in a majority white community. Greater inclusivity is needed.

External concerns involve the pursuit of justice for all, as all are created in the image of God. In our world today we find ourselves in a moment of revelation, and it is moments of revelation that give us the opportunity to envision redemption. As the Biblical period of wandering in the wilderness was necessary before entering the Promised Land, so we need to see challenges we experience now as an opportunity to create more opportunities for the future which have been hard for many to envision.

### **Discussion and Questions - Dr. Tony Kireopoulos as facilitator**

Is “Reparations” the right word to use, as it creates political obstacles? We need radical advancement of opportunity and equality in education, housing and healthcare. **Dr. Harvey** defended the use of the word because what is needed is not just equal access but also extra efforts to make up for those who have been consistently left behind in the past. **Rabbi Wechterman** also noted that the term “reparations” is the term that the African American community has preferred to use to focus the discussion.

How do we build trust with people who have endured separation and alienation for so long? It is a serious challenge because many congregations are not yet even part of the discussion. There is an additional problem in the Jewish community in making distinctions between being a minority and being a racial minority. Jews need to address the issue of racism, but Jews also see anti-Semitism as a challenge our society needs to address. Anti-Semitism, while remaining important, must not be manipulated to further divide communities.

There is a challenge in facing the desire of many to be “color blind” that impedes conversations and understanding of the crisis. Ultimately, nearly every issue in our country requires us to focus on issues of racial justice.

Some denominations have offered materials and programs that have been very positive. Examples are the United Church of Christ and the Reform Movement in Judaism and some outstanding programs have been imitated in local communities.

The next NCC/NCS dialogue meeting will take place in on Zoom, September 3, 2020, featuring a discussion of: **“How has Covid-19 impacted our churches and synagogues, and what will be different when the pandemic is behind us?”**

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Harold J. Berman  
Executive Director  
National Council of Synagogues