

BECOMING
BELOVED
COMMUNITY

Impact Report

2018-2021



**The Diocese
of Southern Ohio**



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Introduction

Since October 2018, I have been blessed to serve in the position of Becoming Beloved Community Coordinator for the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. For the first year, this position was part-time, entirely grant-funded position (thanks to United Thank Offering). The second and third year, the position expanded to a full-time role, with funding from both the diocese and sustained UTO funding along with Roanridge and TEC grant awards. Now, at the end of my third contract year, I faithfully submit this story including a timeline and capture of learnings and recommendations in the spirit of bearing witness to the ministry to date and to archive some of this story. An appendix includes reports, directories, and other key archival documents. I

In gratitude for the blessing of this ministry and of this community of faith—ajh



Background

Since 2018, the Diocese of Southern Ohio has committed to the strategic vision of Becoming Beloved Community. Laying the foundation for Becoming Beloved Community in this diocese, we have drawn on systems thinking and emergent theory; the focus has been on formation through relationship building rooted in scripture and the life and teachings of Jesus. Racial healing and reconciliation has opened the doorway to spiritual transformation, personally and communally. This approach has led to the development of a network of neighbors across the diocese, an active and evolving community of practice, and self-organizing circles. Facing the multiple pandemics of COVID, racial injustice, climate crisis, and economic crisis alongside significant transition of our diocesan leadership, the Becoming Beloved Community movement has been equipped to adapt, innovate, and grow together as we meet the world's suffering and act as Church. ***Together, we are ready for the next season.***



A Pulse

Where are we now?

We find ourselves at a crossroads. With a new Provincial Bishop, a co-convenor transitioning off the Becoming Beloved Community leadership team, the current contract role of Becoming Beloved Community Coordinator ending, and both DSO executive team and congregational leadership undergoing significant change, this is a time of both ample challenge and opportunity. Our diocesan landscape reflects the larger national, global, and planetary landscape. This reality begs the question, who do we choose to be, now?

congregations
engaged

61%

The good news

The good news is that we are well poised to transform ourselves, our diocese, our Church, and beyond. In November 2021, during the DSO Annual Convention themed “Proclaiming the Dream”, the diocese further invested in this vision by fully funding this ministry, adopting a resolution affirming DSO’s support for the continued funding of Becoming Beloved Community in the next triennium, and passing a resolution to continue the work of the DSO Reparations Task Force. Becoming Beloved Community lay and clergy leaders were elected into commission positions including the Standing Committee, Board of Trustees of the Diocese, Board of Trustees of the Church Foundation, Diocesan Council, Budget Committee), and the Procter Board of Directors. With the Presiding Bishop’s recent and bold invitation to Becoming Church, there is ripe opportunity to choose how to move this work forward in meaningful and transformative ways.

Now is the time.

The Vision

During DSO's Proclaiming the Dream Convocation, Canon Rev. Stephanie Spellers blessed us with the vision of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and our Episcopal Church. This vision aligned beautifully with what our hearts and souls had expressed over the course of the year as we practiced StorySharing and dared to proclaim the dream. This bold and courageous vision inspires and encourages us and served as a core offering during DSO's Annual Convention, also themed Proclaiming the Dream, with [Nia McKenney breathing life into the words.](#)

COME AND SEE...

We are becoming a new and re-formed church,
the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement—
individuals, small gathered communities and congregations
whose way of life is the way of Jesus and his way of love,
no longer centered on empire and establishment,
no longer fixated on preserving institutions,
no longer shoring up white supremacy or anything else that hurts or harms any child of
God.

By God's grace,
... WE ARE BECOMING A CHURCH
THAT LOOKS AND ACTS LIKE JESUS.

These past three years in our diocese, Becoming Beloved Community has largely been a grassroots movement, building power and collective will along the margins of our institution. Together, we have laid the foundation for a way forward to a new and emerging Way of Love, Way of Church—a foundation built through authentic and right relationship. The crossroads at which we find ourselves is a pivotal moment to ask ourselves as a whole and integrating corporate body of Christ: ***How might we Become the Church that Looks and Acts like Jesus?***



Areas of Focus

1

Developing Communities of Practice

The work began with listening. Sixteen interviews with diverse stakeholders from across the diocese informed the strategic direction as we set out to lay a strong foundation for network-building. The data from the interviews were synthesized into opportunities for action. What emerged from listening affirmed the intention to begin small and local, with those ready to commit to transformational learning and relationship. There was a desire to move beyond transaction to relationship. The question became, *how can we ready ourselves to lead this work?*

Clergy and lay leaders convened in an intensive learning journey, guided by the Four-Fold Path. Two cohorts completed five-month learning journeys focused on Telling the Truth and Repairing the Breach; each integrating key diocesan-wide events including the May 2019 Convocation with Canon Rev. Stephanie Spellers and October 2019 Clergy Day and Raising Justice Kids Day with Dr. Rev. Jennifer Harvey. These deep dive formation experiences combined with diocesan-wide events served to cross-pollinate learnings and relationships, building the movement and laying a healthy foundation for what 2020 and 2021 would bring.

Becoming Beloved Community is compelled by co-creation--with one another and God as collaborators

2

Capacity-building + grantmaking

With funding from UTO, 2019 offered opportunity to build capacity among those engaging in the formation of Becoming Beloved Community through the learning journey and beyond. \$15,000 was allocated to administer mini-grants to those interested in action projects aimed at racial healing and reconciliation. A grant-making team (including MaryBeth Ingram, Rev. Rick Incorvati, Deborah Allsop, and Amy Howton) created a system—including application; review process; and rubric—and then administered all \$15,000 to twelve different action projects. Grant awardees were asked to share a reflection around intentions and impact. These learnings were integrated into a final report that was published to share more widely learnings and outcomes of this process.



Areas of Focus

3

Circles of Practice

In May 2020, monthly learning journey calls evolved into weekly calls with the need to more deeply connect during COVID and in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. After several months of weekly calls and culture established for how to be together, these calls opened up for anyone to join. As the Friday Circles of Practice grew in number and energy, a focus on both inner spiritual practice and justice-making resulted in a structured weekly rotation of Way of Love and Justice Circles. The Justice Circle invited self-organizing around issues of importance to the community including: voter registration, youth anti-racism, equitable housing, symbolic action, diocesan strategy. Scaffolding supported self-organizing and activated the groups as they formed and moved to action. In January 2021, about six months into this rhythm, it was time to pause and reflect on what we were learning. Worship teams reflected on what we are learning and applied this learning to a Reboot of Circles, including the launch of a new Tuesday Circle. This cycle of reflection and action has continued. In June 2021, another pause was taken as the worship team of "midwives" drew on Stephanie Speller's *Church Cracked Open* for inspiration. In September, the Circles were reintroduced as the Wisdom Circles of Practice, supported by the Seed Starter: Wisdom Circles of Practice.

Cycles of reflection + action have guided and grown the ministry

4

StorySharing Campaign

StorySharing served as the core formation offering in 2021. With UTO funding, a StorySharing Campaign was launched during the 2020 Convention, themed Way of Love. Three video stories highlighting in-depth personal stories of lay leaders in our diocese provided a taste of the power of sharing stories. A diverse design team with consultation from a master StoryTeller created the vision of the Campaign, communicated its purpose and invited. StorySharing series spanned the year including *Advent, Lent, Pentecost, From Many, One*, culminating in the October 2021 Convocation/Revival during which Canon Rev. Stephanie Spellers shared this articulated vision for Becoming Church. Inspired by this language and its strong reflection of the hopes and dreams expressed by lay and clergy leaders throughout the StorySharing campaign, the invitation served to center a *weekend Proclaiming the Dream StorySharing retreat*. The purpose of this retreat was to move from personal to communal story, in keeping with *Proclaiming the Dream*. The retreat gathering generated stories that were then highlighted during the 2021 Proclaiming the Dream Annual Convention. More videostories from the campaign can be found on YouTube.

Areas of Focus

5

Telling the Story

From the beginning, telling the story of Becoming Beloved Community mattered: the why, the who, the what, the how. There has been careful resourcing of communication efforts including [website design](#), biweekly newsletters, and piloting digital platforms (ie Sutra) to support connection, resource sharing, and relationship building. There was learning about and leaning into existing platforms (ie The Episcopal Church asset map) and finding new ways to test and try (Sutra). A TEC Becoming Beloved Community grant supported the design of a digital toolkit, with content generated by dioceses across the Province with the opportunity to launch and activate during an in-person gathering at Bellwether Farm in March 2022. Together with the StorySharing campaign--in which both process of story sharing and the stories themselves mattered--there was a good deal of energy spent evangelizing and sharing the good news of our Becoming Beloved Community.

6

Leadership Structure

In 2018, a Bishop-appointed task force consisting of twenty-one lay and clergy members from across the diocese convened to cast the vision for this work in our diocese. In 2019, that task force was acknowledged for its service and a new leadership team was formed to sustain and grow the ministry. Both these groups have been led by two co-conveners, representing racial diversity and a balance of lay and clergy leadership. The current leadership team (including ten members) set forth the intention to operate as self-organizing circles, with the team itself serving to align, coordinate, and cross-pollinate efforts. The team developed a [Strategic Vision + Mission](#); [Operating Model](#); and role descriptions of [co-convener](#) and [member](#). A question moving forward will be what current leadership structure best supports the spirit of the ministry, as emergent and adaptive, while connecting to the related bodies within our diocese so that Becoming Beloved Community is realized as the lifeblood of all our ministries, efforts, ways of being + doing.



The health of the self determines the health of the self-organizing.

Onward

To sustain the work as transformational, it is vital that this ministry continues to be self-organizing and emergent, adapting regularly to where there is energy and life. Being intentionally Spirit-led and Christ-centered requires adaptive structures that support this kind of growth. In addition to the **below proposed activities, recommendations**

regarding organizational structure include:

- Build on the current operating structure to resource lay leadership and activate self-organizing
- Reimagine and expand systems of accountability and strategic vision
- Strengthen diocesan integration and align on opportunities for collaboration

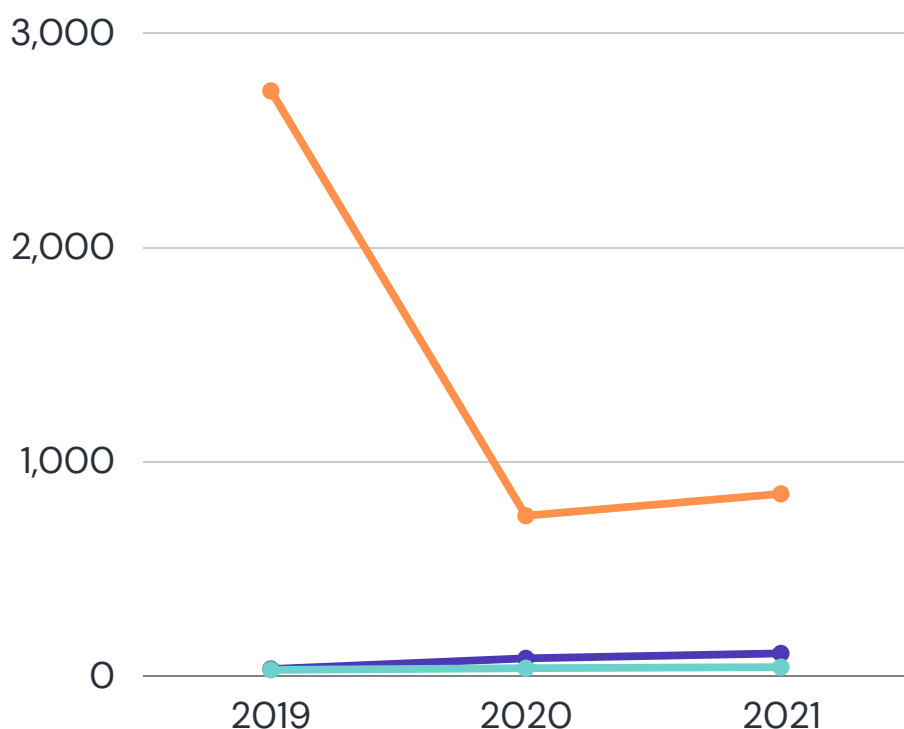
ACTIVITIES	DETAILS	DATE
Development of the Worship Circles	Develop and facilitate Wisdom Circles; support Worship Team of Midwives in regular gatherings to reflect, connect, and apply learnings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing
Development of the Community of Practice through Learning Journeys	Design and facilitate learning journeys focused on unlearning patterns of domination, rooted in scripture/baptismal vows and the Four-Fold Path. Incorporate body-centered practices and nature-based rituals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring 2022 • Fall 2022
StorySharing	In-person + virtual gatherings aimed at creating new communal narratives of “who we are” as a diocese, a church. Generating content (videostories, etc) that can support Bishop search and our evangelism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lent/Advent • Weekend Retreats
Telling the Story	Update and maintain communication platforms (website, biweekly newsletters, video + content creation + distribution) distributing information and sharing resources from TEC and diocese and beyond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing
Redesign of Racial Healing training	Working with Formation team, redesign the current Dismantling Racism training to align and connect more meaningfully with Becoming Beloved Community, rooting the training in our faith and Baptismal vows.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early 2022
Reimagining Our Becoming Beloved Community	In support of our readiness to call our next Bishop, design and co-facilitate a co-creative process aimed at collectively exploring the question, “How might we become a diocese that looks and acts like Jesus?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning early 2022 with convening design team

“Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” --Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

This kind of change--*qualitative change in our souls and a quantitative change in our lives*--is hard to measure. Here are some numbers to help illuminate this change.

By the Numbers

2019-2021



109

members in the
Becoming Beloved
Community network

45

congregations actively
engage in the ministry

4336

total participants in
three years of related
programming

Additional Information:

- Outreach includes 45 of the diocese's 74 congregations, with 109 Becoming Beloved Community liaisons (increase from 40/74 congregations and 86 ambassadors in 2020). See the network directory.
- For details about programs and attendance, see activities report (by year and congregation)
- [Historical Timeline of Becoming Beloved Community-related efforts from 2018-2021](#)



Appendix

Budgets:

- BBC 2018 + 2019 Budget
- BBC 2020 Budget
- BBC 2021 Budget
- Diocesan Budget Proposal 2022

Directories:

- activities report; by year + by congregation
- network map—who we are

Reports:

- 2020 Annual Report for Convention
- 2021 Annual Report for Convention
- UTO Grant Report for 2019–20
- UTO Grant Report for 2020–21
- Reports to Diocesan Council
- Working maps of our network directory and list of engaged leaders in various action teams

Strategic Plans + Visioning Documents

- 2018–2019 Task Force
 - Roster; Roles
 - Learning Themes
 - Leadership Structure
- 2019–2021 Leadership Team
 - Strategic Plan
 - Operating Model
 - Action Plan 2020–2021
 - Role Description: Team Member; Co-Convener

Timelines:

- The Episcopal Church's Response to Race and Racism
- Diocese of Southern Ohio's Becoming Beloved Community Growth

We Are Becoming Beloved Community



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