

RETURN PASSAGE SOIL COLLECTION CEREMONY

JUNE 4, 2023, AT MIDDLEHAM AND ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Return Passage Project is a nationwide event, originally planned for 2019 to coincide with commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans. Sponsored by Black Businessmen International, it will be a symbolic return of soil from United States sites associated with slavery to a site in Ghana that was a major collection point for enslaved Africans. Middleham and St. Peter's is participating with other Southern Maryland sites that share this history.

An invitation to join us. We invite the community to join in the ceremony. We will gather and walk from the Parish Hall to Middleham Chapel at about 11:15 for the ceremony to honor the enslaved and to collect soil. Plan to meet with us at the Parish Hall parking lot at 10210 HG Trueman Road, Lusby, MD 20657 at 11:15 or earlier.



The history of enslavement at Middleham. In 2014, our parish participated in an Episcopal Diocese of Maryland project termed the “[Trail of Souls](#).” Parishes with a history going back to the time of enslavement researched and shared that history. Parishioners who founded the chapel in 1684 and had the brick chapel built in 1748 were for the most part tobacco farmers. In 18th and 19th century Southern Maryland, enslaved labor was used to grow the tobacco. Records from 1850 show that 24 Middleham parishioners and an immediate neighbor owned 458 enslaved people. Slavery was an intrinsic part of the Anglican and Episcopal Church in Maryland up to the Civil

War. Many Episcopal priests owned enslaved people.

The significance of the soil. The soil that we will gather may be one of the few things we now have that has traces of the enslaved people who lived and worked here. For many of them, we do not know their names, their dates of birth, or when they died. Those enslaved people, like us, stood on this soil. They worked, suffered, and endured upon this soil. They likely helped build Middleham chapel on this soil. They raised their families here, though often families were separated and sold away. Let us use this experience to help us to further grow into our commitment to work for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.