

Introduction: Restorative Actions for Collective Healing

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We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

SONYA RENEE TAYLOR

2020 laid bare the deep chasms of inequity in the United States in such a way that they can no longer be ignored. This country, built on slavery and the wresting of resources, must reckon the last 400 years of systemic racism which has created wealth disparities that expand with each generation.

In the last thirty years, the average wealth (assets owned minus debts owed) held by individual white households has more than doubled. Meanwhile the nationwide gap in wealth held by white households relative to its fair and proportionate share across all white, Indigenous, and Black households has tripled from nearly \$4 trillion to more than \$14 trillion.

Indeed, if it were not for system-wide inequities that have long favored white Americans (not all, but in aggregate and on average), their annual earnings would be 5% less and the wealth they hold would be 16% less. These differences reflect the benefits of privilege and the tacit acceptance or acquiescence to receiving disproportionately from the nation's prosperity.

Christians have been called from the very beginning to loose the bonds of injustice and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke. (Isaiah 58)

And yet, we (and in the Presbyterian Church (USA), “we” is primarily white people) regularly prioritize maintaining our facilities, building endowments, and caring for those already in our communities of faith who are familiar to us. We adopt policy statements that speak eloquently of justice. We sponsor local ministries, often focusing on the symptoms ahead of causes. But we feel individually and collectively helpless against the depths of disparity that reside just beyond our walls.

For decades, the Church has wrestled theologically with racism, acknowledging its role in America's greater sin. Again, we feel helpless. We struggle to invest ourselves fully in dismantling racism because we don't know where to start and because we cannot guarantee a successful outcome. We struggle to invest resources that we might someday need for ourselves or our families. But deep down we recognize that we have received more than our share, and that we shouldn't struggle to justify returning what should already belong to others.

As day-to-day injustices continue to harm marginalized communities, the divide widens between our lives and our potential for greater kinship across all communities. It drives a wedge of distrust on one side and complicity on the other. Restorative Action is intended as a steppingstone; an invitation for those who've benefited from privilege to return a portion of those benefits, offering them in good faith toward what is owed.

To this end, individuals, congregations, and affiliated organizations are invited to commit to surrender funds from the gains that privilege skews to them (currently 5% of income and/or 16% of accumulated wealth), passing these amounts on for the self-development of Indigenous and Afro-American communities in America.

In this effort, we are seeking merely to begin returning what we can to others in order that we may begin restoring balance, rejecting privilege, and reckoning with what is right and fair. Amounts contributed are intended neither as charity, or as mission, or as reparation toward legacy national harms. In this initial offering, we seek the grace of our siblings to accept what we can return toward debts we owe, acknowledging it will never be enough.

Today, we have an opportunity to begin weaving a new garment; to begin renouncing privilege, to free ourselves to engage more fully with others in justice, and to step in good faith toward potential reconciliation.