



Churches' Reparations Action Forum (Jamaica)

Seven point action plan

1. Apology

Churches and para-church organisations are urged to summon the moral courage to confront the realities of the past complicity and, in recognising the persistent deleterious impact of the legacies, commit to publicly atone for their historical participation in these dehumanising atrocities. Slavery was an affront to human dignity against which, in unity, the children of God must stand.

2. Addressing the psychological trauma affecting identity and self-worth

Reparations are meant to contribute to the healing of people and communities from generations of psychological trauma. This healing approach focuses on the reconnection of the descendant to his/her dignity and worth.

The churches, energised by the power of the Holy Spirit, are best placed to engage this work towards the holistic healing of the person, body, mind and spirit and the healing of relationships. In this process, the church will confront the harmful results of some ecclesiastic and theological positions which in the past provided support, if not encouragement, to forces of oppression in the process of dehumanising large swathes of humanity.

New and liberating ways of interpreting Scripture will provide the moral underpinning for actions of healing and reconciliation. Some of these practical programmes of healing are addressed in Appendix one.

3. Promoting safety and security through repudiation of violence

The centuries of trauma have significantly affected attitudes and approaches to human relations, family formation and parenting. Established systemic authoritarian attitudes are reflected in institutions of authority like schools, security services and other public services.

The evidence of the lingering results of the psychological trauma are more and more prevalent in the aggression on display in the society. The required work of repair must include confronting the deep-seated historical legacy of violence and its institutionalised undergirding. The church can establish programmes in community which reshape attitudes to children, parenting models, gender relations and the

sanctity of life. Such work must influence persons at all age levels, rescuing the children from the violence-ridden conditions in which too many are socialised. Appendix two is an example of such a practical community programme.

4. Reimaging education

So much of the societal repair work could flow from educational interventions. Post-Emancipation Christian missions contributed much to the early evolution of education. Reparations in this era must advance that foundational work by greater and more focused involvement in public education for all age cohorts from early childhood, to primary and secondary.

These acts of reparatory justice would focus not only on the access to education, but also on what is being taught. Curriculum development in this era requires a determined effort to include the pre-colonisation history of Africa, African cultures, heritage and Afro-centric thinking. African approaches to knowledge accumulation, storage and dissemination need to be exposed to a young generation in an effort to deepen their understanding and enhance their self-concept.

Theological education

A particularly important input of reparatory action of churches in education should be in theological education.

The society could benefit greatly from the provision of resources from European churches earmarked to strengthen the curriculum of theological education and ministerial formation. Such enhancement would focus resources and effort on facilitating access for students and infecting the curriculum of existing institutions with a theological discourse on decolonisation and freedom. Practical approaches to such a project are explored below.

5. Sharing citizen property ownership and wealth creation

Among the most devastating legacies of the colonial slave debacle is the continuing landlessness of large swathes of these post-colonial populations. It is perhaps the most significant factor which has hindered formally enslaved people in their drive to generational wealth creation.

As in education, the post-emancipation church contributed much by way of attempting land distribution practices which were made available to the formerly enslaved.

New free villages

Among those efforts were the establishment of free villages, and the establishment of saving and investment models like credit unions and building societies. In this era, a renewed commitment to repair would include churches offering church-owned land

resources for the resettlement of landless persons, community resources for training in financial literacy and exposure for improved attitudes to investment and wealth creation in all levels of society.

Community transformation

Most of the current decaying urban settlements can trace their depreciating conditions to the inequitable spread of material resource which is a hallmark of post-colonial societies.

At independence, there were no funds given to develop Jamaica by the British government, though they had benefitted enormously from the chattel slavery of the Africans and their descendants.

Today in the Caribbean, and especially in Jamaica, we find many communities that are called garrison communities. Defined as geographically discrete, fortified, urban areas, they are marked by poverty, gang violence, political manipulation, and confrontational relationships with law enforcement institutions. The persons who live in these communities are mainly those of African descent who have become entrenched in a vicious cycle.

It will take resources and effective strategic partnerships to make their transformation a reality. Multi-sectoral partnerships, such as with the public and private sectors, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and the diaspora community, will effect this repair.

A key stakeholder for community transformation, and one which should play a leading role, is the church. With reparation funding provided, the church could play a most effective role as it is one of the primary change agents in society, having given its continual service to community residents and continuing to enjoy high levels of trust.

6. Establishing spatial markers and honoring of ancestors

Reparations must affect attitudes to collective memory of ancestors. Millions of forebears whose names we do not remember or know must become central in this generation's commitment to repair.

Post-colonial societies are too often replete with monuments and other spatial markers which commemorate the coloniser to the detriment of any positive reference to the formerly enslaved and oppressed.

Reparatory action in this era would engage communities in the process of establishing spatial markers which reflect the contribution and struggle of the majority of the ancestors. Their courage and resilience would be celebrated as

gardens, art installations and other poignant spatial markers, and provide continual reminders of their contribution to their community's existence.

7. Addressing agriculture and climate change

Poor attitudes and approaches to agriculture have largely held back these societies and their economies. The natural environment of the colony has borne the damaging effects of aggressive, extractive economic activity focused on meeting needs of foreign palates and building foreign economies. The Caribbean's colonial history has significantly contributed to societies in which the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources has created conditions that left economies more precarious and nations more vulnerable to climate shocks, and has diminished their capacity to utilise abundant renewable energy resources in a disciplined and productive way.

Climate crisis

Often, crops chosen to be cultivated were not indigenous to this region, and choice lands utilised for aggressive agricultural and other practices would leave hillsides denuded, indigenous fauna bereft of their natural habitat, air and waterways polluted, and coastlines decimated.

They now find themselves in the clutches of the global climate crisis.

Food insecurity

In post-colonial societies, some economies reside in a state of persistent food insecurity.

Land reform and sustained effort towards attitudinal change in favour of sustainable agricultural practices will lead to recovery from the damage and contribute to the staving-off of further climate-change damage. In this, the churches could be resourced to play a significant role through community action for sustainable agricultural development.