



The Restorative Actions Catechism is an invitation to engage in difficult theological questions about institutional injustices. We know it will raise additional questions and we hope that you will share those questions with us so that we all may continue in this conversation and work towards right relationships.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL MOTIVATION FOR RESTORATIVE ACTION?

The individual or organization who participates in restorative action is like Zacchaeus who upon engaging Jesus rejoins his community by returning what he had been allowed to extract in his job with the Romans (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus shows us that greed can turn a human being into an agent of extraction and the Gospel has the power to restore whole communities.

Zacchaeus not only returned what he extracted, he also restored himself to the community by paying back more than what was owed as a sign of his gratitude to God for the very possibility of regaining a human position in the covenant community.

Restorative Action is an opportunity to respond to God's abundant grace by surrendering ill-gotten gains and using them for the benefit of African American and Indigenous people and communities from whom they have been systemically taken and withheld.

IS RESTORATIVE ACTION THE SAME AS REPARATIONS?

No, they are not the same. The difference between the two is very important. Restorative action is a moral reckoning while reparations is more like a balance sheet of accounts.

Restoration is an effort to bring something closer to what it should have been by rebalancing misalignments, replenishing resources spent, and re-establishing trust. Restorative action is a relatively small and voluntary act by an individual, a family, a congregation, an organization, or an institution to acknowledge white complicity in the extreme wealth disparity that has existed since before this country's founding under the

dubious pretext of establishing what has become the United States as a “New Israel”¹.
(add footnote) Restorative action, therefore, is an unprecedented effort to achieve balance where true equity was never intended.

Reparations, however, is a much larger, systemic act of Congress that involves the whole of the United States aimed at making material amends to African American and Indigenous people as well as legal changes to dismantle laws and policies that continue to sustain institutional racism and oppression.

In a way, you might consider restorative action as the church’s internal yet public witness demonstrating the necessity, feasibility, and righteousness of reparations from the United States for the appropriation of Indigenous lands and subjecting Africans and their U.S. American descendants to chattel slavery, Jim Crow policies, and ongoing institutional racism.

¹In the essay “The Idea of the Wilderness of the New World in Cotton Mather's 'Magnalia Christi Americana,' George H. Williams provides an informative analysis of Mather's concept of *America as a New Israel*. Williams offers that Mather held that “God in His providence was so to arrange human affairs that the Europeans prepared by Him to fill the waste places with would enter the devilish American desert only after literature had been reborn, the art of printing had been acquired, and the religion to be transplanted have been restored to the perfection of its apostolic 'golden age.'” For Williams, Mather's interpretation of the *American wilderness* is “no mere chronicle but a theodicy of the New English Israel renewed, regenerated, and ever ready to face 'wilderness temptations,' moving confidently toward a cosmic vindication of the faith.” from *Cotton Mather: Magnalia Christi Americana*, 49-53., ed. Kenneth B. Murdock

IS RESTORATIVE ACTION THE SAME AS CHARITY OR MISSION GIVING?

No, restorative action is not charity or mission giving.

Everything we have belongs to God. And through our human-made laws and institutions white people have unfairly gained wealth and income and have been poor stewards of God’s abundant gifts. All three ways of giving are ways that we can care for people.



Restorative action is a specific way that we express reciprocity in relationship with African American and Indigenous people and communities.

Restorative action addresses deferred responsibility for the harm of systemic imbalances. It is a movement toward justice and an opportunity for racism’s beneficiaries to begin to repair the social and economic damage produced by the ill-gotten advantages gained from the dehumanizing practice of chattel slavery and continued through centuries of racist policies.

It is not “generosity” to give back something that wasn’t yours to begin with. Restorative action does not take the place of charitable giving or mission giving. Restorative action is justice.

The consequence of institutional racism is an inherited debt (an inherited debt that has tripled in the last 30 years) and it is our responsibility to begin to correct centuries of human-made injustice.

Restorative action is a transformational process by which we all live into God’s design for *all* of us.

OUR AFRICAN-AMERICAN PARISHIONERS SAY THEY FEEL INSULTED BY THE IDEA OF REPARATIONS. THEY FEEL IT LABELS THEM AS VICTIMS WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT AND DISREGARDS HOW MUCH THEY’VE ACHIEVED AGAINST SUBSTANTIAL ODDS. HOW DO WE HONOR THEIR VOICE AND SUPPORT THIS AT THE SAME TIME?

It is true that restorative action is connected to the historic demand for reparations. However, restorative action is the church’s own acknowledgement of its distinct complicity in transforming historic sin into economic and social structure. Restorative action, therefore, is a movement toward right relationships through the surrender of stolen community assets that will be jointly invested in addressing systemic inequities.

Further, restorative action is not being requested. It is being offered as a repayment of a debt by humble and contrite people seeking acceptance, recognizing that even

restorative action cannot compensate for the historical harm. It is somewhat like Esau, who did not seek Jacob’s offering and even rejected it at first. But Esau was compelled to receive it for sake of reconciliation. (Genesis 33:10)

Also, just as the demand for reparations is not about individuals, but a collective demand that honors the labor of one’s ancestors, restorative action is a path toward redemption and healing not only from past wrongs but also for emerging conditions that are inextricably related to longstanding and unjust deficits.

HOW CAN WE BE SENSITIVE TO THE FEELINGS OF WHITE AMERICANS WHO FACED THEIR OWN SET OF CHALLENGES OR WHO ARE DESCENDANTS OF POOR IMMIGRANTS WHO CAME TO THE UNITED STATES AFTER SLAVERY ENDED? WHY SHOULD THEY BE ASKED TO PAY FOR SOMETHING THEY WERE NOT INVOLVED IN?

The benefits of U.S. American life remain inseparable from the economic and political procedures of its founding. **All** of the nation’s many immigrants, then, have benefited tremendously from the economic engine of the slave trade and from the slave labor that built this country and sustained it for generations. And you must account for the fact that the power to accumulate and inherit resources didn't stop with the Emancipation Proclamation. Most immigrant families weren’t forced to challenge the roots of systemic racism as many others were invited to fold into whiteness as their evolving identity.

Certainly, all who are Christians who have decided to make the United States their home must honor their new country’s debts—especially when those debts are owed to the peoples whose struggles helped create the opportunity for many immigrant groups to obtain the possibility of thriving in the United States *despite* their racial or ethnic status.

Therefore, to be completely honest with ourselves, we must respond to what Restorative action guidelines reveal. Restorative action does not suggest that the hard work and accomplishments of white Americans are not legitimate, only that their financial benefit would likely be significantly less if they had been subject to the obstacles Indigenous people and African Americans face as others accrue benefits.

Also, restorative giving is designed to be proportionate to individual and organizational wealth, giving should be relative to the wealth or income that is available for surrender. Many will not have wealth or income to surrender at all, which is fine.

HOW DOES CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS AND UNITY APPLY TO HARM DONE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

As Christians, we should lift up the six R's of remembrance, remorse, repentance, repair, reconciliation, and resurrection. It is a counterfeit faith if we expect forgiveness and jump straight to reconciliation, without the necessary steps of remembrance, remorse, repentance, and repair.

We cannot move to forgiveness and unity without first acknowledging and letting go of the illusions and sense of innocence. We cannot assert innocence when the explorers laid claim to the land of this "New World" in the name of Jesus and subjected the Indigenous peoples to perpetual enslavement. We cannot assert innocence when Africans were kidnapped, purchased, and sold to toil the land for the gain of others. We must begin the hard work of healing and forgiveness by dealing with the economic and theological ideologies that gave rise to the divisions in the first place.

Repairing the trauma of dehumanization, disinheritance and dispossession requires an earnest effort on the part of the individuals that have caused the harm. Because we can do all things through Christ, whom strengthens us, we need not worry about the magnitude of the task at hand. Despite centuries of oppression and creation of systems and institutions to keep the oppression standing, let us keep our eyes on the preferred future we are working together to create.

Forgiveness is at times served as a replacement for repair, however the work of repair is what makes forgiveness possible.