**A model for church-led restitution**

**Introduction**

All white South Africans have a restitution responsibility due to the immediate or generational unjust socio-economic benefit gained through colonialism and apartheid. The unjust benefit of a small minority and the continuing inequity resulting from it is one of the root causes for continuing conflict in South Africa. There can only be real and sustainable peace in the country if the root causes for ongoing conflict are addressed. The church, both black and white, should accept responsibility for securing the future of South Africa; and act as facilitators for restitution in the country.

Most white South Africans profess to be Christian, yet many (if not most) supported and/or tolerate racial discrimination within the church environment: For example, different salaries for ministers of the different racial groups within the same church movements, racially segregated church services, unrepresented racial demographics in church leadership. The unequal financial relationship between the rich white and poor black churches make the black church dependant on the white church; and this situation perpetuates the ideology of white supremacy and limits learning and contextual theology.

Churches themselves should apply acts of restitution. For instance, in a town where a specific denomination has more than one church building, one of these should be given to a black church community as an act of restitution. Another example is for privileged white congregations to partner with under-privileged black congregations (but not in a charitable/paternalistic manner), and ensure that the income of the two churches are divided equally between the two.

**How can the church best be involved and play a restitution facilitation role?**

***Church Ministers***

Ministers and other church leaders (both black and white) are well positioned to accept the leadership responsibilities and roles needed for the promotion of the need to apply restitution; and with the practical implementation of restitution.

* Ministers need to develop an understanding of the different phases in the restitution process as mentioned above:

1. acknowledge that an injustice occurred
2. truth telling about what the wrong doing entails, who was affected by the wrongdoing? [listening to the stories of those affected by the wrongdoing]; who was responsible for the wrongdoing? [listening to their reasoning why they have committed the wrong]
3. offenders need to take responsibility for the wrongdoing
4. offenders need to show remorse for the wrongdoing
5. offenders need to render unconditional apologies for the wrong doing
6. offenders need to show signs of transformed behaviour – their lives are not the same anymore
7. Offenders need to show the fruit of their new life through acts of restitution – the proof of the sincerity of their remorse and unconditional apology.

* Ministers also need to develop and deepen their understanding that
* colonialism and apartheid traumatised black South Africans
* unresolved trauma leads to the re-enactment of trauma
* restitution is a vehicle to break the cycles of trauma
* Ministers need to appreciate the difference between restitution and charity
* Ministers need to develop a theological rationale for restitution
* Ministers need to familiarise themselves with the TRC restitution recommendations to the South African faith community
* Ministers need to create opportunities to educate congregation members on above-mentioned matters through sermons, bible studies, public dialogues, intergenerational dialogues, conversations with those that have been affected by colonialism and apartheid, through the arts and other creative ways of drawing their churches into these discussions.

***Congregation members***

Be open to be convinced of the theological rationale of restitution and energised to be trained in the various aspects of restitution education.

Be open to commit to cross-cultural exchange (go and sleep in a township and familiarise yourself with how apartheid and colonialism impacted on people’s lives; start conversations with victims of colonialism and apartheid rule to establish what restitution expectations they have).

Be aware of and engage in the process towards acts of restitution:

* The white person requests a conversation with an individual or party who has/have been abused by the policies of colonialism and apartheid
* The white person acknowledges his/her role in this unjust history
* The white person declares his/her willingness to take responsibility for the role he/she played in colonialism and apartheid
* The white person asks the abused individual/party what could/should the white person contribute towards restitution
* The white person shares practical suggestions he/she has about restitution actions
* The white and black persons agree on what the restitution action should be.

***Congregations***

After congregation members have been educated on the different aspects related to a theology of restitution, predominantly white congregations should:

* Identify black congregations (not necessarily of a similar theological tradition) with whom they would like to establish a restitution partnership.
* Establish if such black congregations are willing to enter into a restitution partnership.
* Establish a committee between the white and black congregations to oversee the restitution partnership.
* The partnership shall be founded on:

1. the principles of the theology of restitution (i.e. offenders’ acknowledgment of abuse, taking full responsibility for the abuse, truth telling about the abuse, sincere remorse, atonement, unconditional apology, proof of transformed behaviour, restitution, restoration, living in peace with each other, reconciliation and forgiveness)
2. a clear differentiation between charity and restitution
3. the principle that the party harmed by the injustices of colonialism and apartheid should take the lead in steering the restitution process and should determine what the restitution actions will be
4. the principle that the party responsible for the injustices of colonialism and apartheid should approach their participation in the restitution process with humility and readiness to be led by those who have been harmed.