



THE RESTITUTION FOUNDATION

"Giving back for going forward"

Index

Using Hands & Hearts to Make Restitution _____	p.1
The Foundation for Church-led Restitution _____	p. 2
Mending a mindset _____	p. 2, 3
The truth about thorns _____	p. 4
Healing of Memories _____	p. 4, 5
Give back for moving forward _____	p. 6, 7
Rebuild, Restore, Renew _____	p. 8, 9
Growing together _____	p. 10
We invite you ... _____	p. 11
Making restitution practical _____	p. 12,13



Using Hands & Hearts to Make Restitution

Where there's life there's a story.
Each and every breathing being has a story.
From conception to conclusion. Start to finish.
Sometimes the beginning is bad and the end uncertain,
but often it's the middle that matters most
and gives meaning to our stories.
May we open our hearts.
May we reach out and lend a restoring hand.
May we share our stories.
And may all of this give meaning to our lives.

The Foundation for Church-led Restitution

In February 2002 thirteen South African Christians from different cultures, denominations, socio-economic and political backgrounds, came together. They heard our country's desperate cry for restitution. They started to meet regularly to discuss the South African churches' responsibility to bring about restitution between the very different spheres in the South African society. And they agonised, because: How does one start to deconstruct a divide as great as the divide between black, coloured and white? How does one unite rich and poor? What is the role of the church in bridging the gap? And what would the biblical basis for such action be?



In 2003 The Foundation for Church-led Restitution was established. The Foundation grew by God's grace, and how appropriate: God gave us the foundation to build on using our hands and hearts -- being his hands and his heart. In 2006 I, Rev Deon Snyman, was appointed Chief Operating Officer of the Restitution Foundation and ever since I have seen so much restoration and renewal that

I simply have to share some of the many stories that changed lives, hearts and ultimately the way our hands come into play.

Mending a mindset

"White people, I wish you can understand that we don't want your houses, your money or your jobs ... we want your hearts, your friendship, your love. We want you!"

These are the words of an unemployed, thirty something father and member of the Uniting Reformed Church in Khayelitsha. And in one single and very simple sentence

he captured the idea that lies at the heart of restitution: that in the South African context, those who were advantaged by the former apartheid regime need to now make restitution – and restitution is the act of giving back something that was lost or stolen or unjustly taken away. The previously advantaged should give back what was taken away unjustly from the previously disadvantaged – whether it be dignity, friendship, education or something as tangible as land, a church building or houses.

We were at a Healing of Memories workshop and this man's straightforward, honest and truthful words made a huge impression. How astonishing that it can be so simple and yet so difficult? With one insightful sentence he stripped restitution down to what it really is: having a heart for another human being, those who endured the injustices that were done to them. This black South African Christian gives our materialistic view a deathblow. They do not want our possessions. Restitution does include sharing material belongings, but restitution is about more than giving back material things, more than giving of yourself – it's about giving yourself.

All he wants is to be acknowledged as a person. A creation of God. Significant. Worthy of your compassion and heartfelt attention. Interaction. Civilised. A word of confidence instead of making him feel inferior. And this whole approach includes that the injustices he endured in the past be addressed so that his quality of life may improve on a material and very practical level. Restitution has a dual nature: physical and spiritual. They go together. You cannot separate these two aspects – because when you separate them, you let the separation of the past live on. Give with your heart and your hands. Both. This is how we will heal the wounds of yesterday. Listen to, for example, a man like this one's story. Listen to what he has to say. Because in there you will find a universal message ... from God.

The truth about thorns

As mentioned, restitution is more than merely returning material things to the rightful owners. I've recently met a bishop from Uganda. We started talking about restitution and he used a spot-on comparison.

When he was a child, his family was very poor and he never had any shoes. This meant that he often had the painful experience of having thorns in his feet. Now that he is a bishop, he has enough money to buy himself shoes. But the shoes cannot take the pain away if the thorns stay inside. One has to take the thorns out in order for the wound to heal so that the shoes will be comfortable to wear. One has to treat the wound and eliminate the pain. Then move on. Forward.

When you only make restitution in a materialistic way, but the thorn stays stuck in the soul, the pain won't go away, healing will be impossible and restitution will not happen.

When I told the bishop's story to a professor in Uganda, he made a very wise comment. He told me that his parents are very poor and that they often encourage him to come and visit them because they would like to see him. But the professor told me that this invitation goes hand in hand with the expectation that their son will bring them meal and sugar. In the same way the bishop's expectation is dual: for the white person to come and visit (give of him-/herself spiritually) and to bring food (to provide in his material needs) in order to make his day-to-day life more manageable.

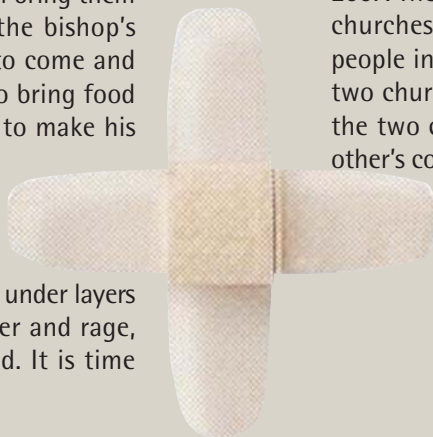
Healing of Memories

Hurt has many faces. And often it lies hidden under layers and layers of secondary emotions like anger and rage, bitterness, hopelessness, depression, hatred. It is time

that we deal with the pain of the past; dig deep and heal the hurt in our hearts. Pluck the thorn. Do something. Don't just say you're sorry – show you're sorry. Do something that will make a difference in the here and now. Provide in the physical needs of those who were unjustly disadvantaged by apartheid. And do it with your heart and soul.

When we started to facilitate discussion groups, ie small groups of ten to fifteen people to meet monthly for an hour two to listen to each other's stories, to acknowledge each other's hurt and guilt, work through the resentment and shame, the uncertain words on almost everyone's lips – from both sides – was: "We want to trust you". Many joint church services, church bazaars, dinners at each other's homes, weekends away to relax and get to know the people we thought was so different from us, followed.

One example of the joint effort churches made was between the Sonstraal Dutch Reformed Church in Durbanville and the Eureka Lutheran Church in Elsiesriver. A joint group of 25 people from these two churches have been meeting monthly since August 2006. Sonstraal is a white church and Eureka a coloured church. The Institute for Healing of Memories facilitated a restitution and healing weekend for the group in Betty's Bay in June 2007. The result was the decision that these two churches will together build a crèche for the people in Elsiesriver. Joint services between the two churches are ongoing and the ministers of the two churches take turns to preach in each other's congregations. The two churches decided to adopt each other and are busy developing a theology of adoption to give meaning to the adoption process.



Another heart-warming example is the restitution discussion group of the Stellenberg Dutch Reformed Church (white), the Kraaifontein United Reformed Church and the Khayelitsha United Reformed Church (Xhosa). These three churches have joint church services. The joint service alternates between the three churches. The DRC Stellenberg (white) sponsors bus transport as an act of restitution for the members from Khayelitsha and Kraaifontein when the service takes place in the Stellenberg or Kraaifontein church buildings. As a further act of restitution the men's movements of the three churches decided to unite and form one men's movement. The youth's and women's movement are in the process of doing the same. The three churches also decided to build a house for a homeless person.

So you can see that reconciliation doesn't only mean saying "I'm sorry" but doing something about it. Today strong, caring relationships have been built between people and churches previously separated by apartheid. And the words we wanted to hear, have been spoken: "We trust you."

... Give back for moving forward ...

During apartheid the Group Areas Act caused a lot of churches to lose their church buildings. Losing land is one of the most traumatic experiences one can have. And restitution is after all the act of giving back something that was lost, stolen or unjustly taken.

The Good Shepherd Anglican Church Kirstenbosch helped the Protea Village Church to claim back their land. The claim was successful and the former residents of the Protea Village Church are in the process of moving back. As an act of restitution the members of the Good Shepherd Parish also decide to enlarge the current church building to accommodate the whole of the returned Protea Village Community. The building costs are estimated at R3 million.



Another great act of restitution is included in the story of the St Stephens Community in Paarl. The Dutch Reformed Church Paarl Berg (white) became the owners of the St Stephens Community's Anglican Church Paarl after the Group Areas Act became law.

As an act of restitution the DRC gave the church building back to the Anglican Church in 2003. The Foundation facilitated a number of restitution acts between the two churches, one of which is lead to farmers in the area deciding to donate land to the Paarl Municipality for the building of houses for farm workers. More than 60 houses will be built.

Rebuild, Restore, Renew

The Foundation for Church-led Restitution wants to rectify the injustices of the past and the inequity between different spheres of society that exists today. At the March 2007 AGM of the organisation, the Foundation was advised:

1. To develop a draft restitution plan for South Africa.
2. To introduce this plan to the different South African Church leaders and ecumenical organisations and to work with them in the further development of the plan.
3. To then introduce the plan to NGO's, business sector and government, and get their input before the finalisation of the plan.
4. To actively market the implementation of the final restitution plan.

In preparation for the development of the draft restitution plan, the Foundation identified a number of specific restitution focus areas: Theology of Restitution, Just Economy, Housing, Education, Employment, Land Reform and 2010 Soccer World Cup. Task teams for each of the focus areas were established and each task team appointed their own chairpersons. Every task team was asked to develop a draft restitution plan for their specific focus area.

76 people served on the different task teams and a total of 23 task team meetings took place between April and September 2007. The chairpersons of the task teams served on a joint task team and at two joint task team meetings the draft restitution plan of the various task teams was developed into a single draft restitution plan.

The Foundation is currently to introduce the draft restitution plan to church leaders and leaders of the different ecumenical bodies and to invite them to collaborate with the Foundation in the further development of the document. The aim with this document is to influence the South African society to start making restitution in such a way that it can lead to the healing of South Africa as a nation.

The following story is just one of many inspirational acts of restitution. Charles Robertson realised that he unfairly benefited from the Apartheid system. He knew he had a responsibility to make restitution and decided to part with two family farms in the George/Mossel Bay area. The Foundation sold the farms and used R300 000 of the money to send seven students from this area to receive tertiary education for the next three years, after partnering with REAP – the Rural Education Access Program. The Foundation also established a partnership with Habitat for Humanity and has put R200 000 towards the building of houses for homeless people in various part of the Cape.



Growing together

Estelle Raymond is a member of the education task team of the Foundation and is actively involved in restitution initiatives in Kersboslaagte, Stellenbosch. She initiated weekly adult literacy and job creation workshops for the illiterate farm workers of Kersboslaagte in collaboration with The Maryland Adult Literacy Resource Centre, which is based in Hanover Park.

For Estelle as a urban woman, Kersboslaagte was a world apart from what was familiar to her. She was a lawyer in Paarl when she decided to do a course in pastoral counselling. At the same time a prosecutor asked her to work with nine young boys who gang-raped a nine year old girl. They were between eleven and thirteen years of age, but looked like six to seven years old – possibly due to malnutrition. Some of the boys had been sexually molested as toddlers. She visited the boys on the farm where they worked and was shocked to see the extreme poverty, neglect, alcoholism, violence and abuse in which they lived.

One of the boys decided to change for the better. He went to school regularly in the past three years and now he is in high school. He tends to a large vegetable garden that he planted himself. He is a soft-spoken, self-contained and gentle young child who often takes care of the smaller children when their parents are drunk. The little ones say they feel safe with him. What a confusing and hard world to live in? For a child. Because he is a child. Just like all the other vulnerable and neglected children who commit these horrible crimes. These children are our future. We need to reach out a helping hand like Estelle did. Estelle feels that it is a process of growing together as human beings and in the understanding of each other. Change might not happen overnight. But in a small persistent way we can try to right the wrongs of the past in all of society.

We invite you ...

Dear Reader, you can become part of the Foundation by paying an annual fee of R100 into the Foundation's bank account: Foundation for Church-led Restitution, ABSA Tableview, Account 4057348021.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Fund in the form of a donation to the Foundation for Church-led Restitution Housing Fund, please deposit it into Account 919 575 1755, ABSA Santyger. All proceeds will go to our partner Habitat for Humanity.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Fund in the form of a donation to the Foundation for Church-led Restitution Bursary fund, please deposit it into Account 919 575 2890 , ABSA Santyger. All proceeds will go to our partner the Rural Education Access Program (REAP) who awards bursaries to children from previously disadvantaged rural communities.



Making restitution practical

Stay in South Africa.

Follow a profession that will serve others, especially the poor.

Teach mathematics to township people.

Give extra mathematics lessons to township children.

Give annual donations for church reparations.

Start a bursary fund for black students' tertiary education.

Ensure that anyone you employ is well taken care of (medical aid and pension).

Sell some of your land and use the proceeds to build homes for the previously disadvantaged.

Sell your holiday home and use the proceeds to build homes for the previously disadvantaged.

Investigate how your denomination acquired its land.

Mentor a previously disadvantaged kid.

Mentor a previously disadvantaged family financially.

Adopt one or more orphan(s).

Learn to live more simply and share your wealth.

Learn to speak Xhosa.

Give away your second car.

Sponsor and put 8 black kids through school (including textbooks, transport and lunch).

Find jobs for 8 young people when they finish school.

Merge organisations that are racially segregated.

Contribute towards a restitution fund.

Support the Basic Income Grant Initiative.

Move to a township church.

Visit these websites for more info and inspiration:

www.restitution.org.za

www.healingofmemories.org.za

www.habitat.org.za

www.reap.org.za

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