

Reparations: The Way of Love

by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

My childhood Roman Catholic friends used to talk about having to go to confessional and never liking it. In the Episcopal Church in which I grew up, we used to say a prayer of general confession each Sunday. That seemed like enough for me then. I was glad not to be required to go to confessional with my priest. I also remembering feeling guilty in church during Lent—so much talk about sin, our sin, my sin.

As I have gotten older, during Lent and every day, I realize that making amends for my ill-considered actions and words, confessing the errors to God and myself, as well as to those impacted by my actions and words, and making changes as necessary going forward, is absolutely essential for my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, not to mention the quality of my relationships with others.

God helps me discern what to say and do, and when to do it. Facing myself in the mirror, taking stock of where I have strayed from the truth or live in denial of my part in a difficult situation, acknowledging the skeletons in my self-created and self-maintained dark closet, is vital to living the life to which God calls me.

This is why I am a strong advocate for reparations in response to the wrongs and ills of our society. Whether it is to Indigenous people slaughtered and forced to flee, or Black people enslaved and Jim Crow'd, or women denied basic dignity, or immigrants treated like scum, or children's welfare ignored, it is necessary for us to confess and to seek to repair what we can.



Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us is fundamental to living holy lives, and we must also, where at all possible, take actions to redress the wrongs we have committed or permitted. The argument, “I did not enslave anyone or commit genocide” and therefore “bear no responsibility for that done by my ancestors or others” denies a fundamental truth: namely that even though we have not taken those actions, we

are the beneficiaries of them.

If we are White, we live a nation where simply by the color of their non-White skin people are denied dignity, jobs, the ability to vote, housing, health care and so much more. This is the inheritance on which we still live. And this reality is true for many others—whether women who must contend with underlying and even blatant sexism, or children allowed to rot in unloving, uncaring families and orphanages or locked in cages, and many more.

So what is to be done? Confess, confess, and keep confessing. And act, act, and keep acting to compensate the victims for their losses as well as changing ourselves, committing not only to make reparations for the past but also to create a different future for ourselves and our world. When we, as individuals and a society own our failings, change our behavior and commit to doing better in the future we become pilgrims moving toward divine wholeness.

Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you,” meaning not just our family and communities but the entire world. We do that when we repair damage rather than perpetuate it.

God makes the way, shows us the way, empowers us on our way, if we have the courage and wisdom to go with God, to truly, deeply love enough to change.