

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

A Resolution to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Indiana-Kentucky Conference and the Central Atlantic Conference

SUMMARY

This Resolution calls on the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to publicly proclaim its support of the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, or like-legislation that establishes a body to study and design Reparations proposals for African Americans. This Resolution also urges partnership between UCC settings where appropriate to organize education, discussion, and direct-action opportunities to further a ministry of Reparatory Justice and Reparations.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Reparations are central in the Bible to correct wrongdoing, including themes of compensation, restitution, and *teshuvah*, or “return.”

The Jewish notion of return is not merely an attitude of confession or admission, but *teshuvah* calls on the perpetrator of a wrong to make sincere corrections in behavior to seek forgiveness. This theme of return and restitution is a theme throughout the Bible.

The narrative of the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt and liberated by a just God working through God’s called liberators, Moses and his brother Aaron, is a foundational story that the Hebrew people recognize in their most holy rituals and customs, including Passover and the weekly sacred time of sabbath. The liberated people are promised not only freedom from enslavement but also the promise of a land to call their own. Beyond the promise of a future homeland, **Exodus 12:35-36** reports that the Hebrew people were granted material items (gold, silver, and clothing) by their former Egyptian enslavers after God showed favor toward the Hebrew people in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Continuing the story of liberation and return, **Exodus 21-22** expands God’s way of justice and makes clear the laws of restitution for wrongdoing and articulates the rules for treatment and liberation of an enslaved person. We may disagree in the modern context with these behavior codes toward enslaved persons, but the principle of full restitution is clear. In related instruction, **Deuteronomy 15:12-15** furthers these commands with the rule to “Provide for [the former enslaved person] liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress, thus giving to [them] some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you” (NRSVUE).

37 **Leviticus 5** describes the compensation that must be made for wrongdoing in the form of
38 offering and atonement through sacrifice. **Ezekiel 33:15–16** demands that a perpetrator of wrong
39 must return what they have taken, and **Ezra 6:1-12** places the demands of return in context of
40 King Cyrus’s reversal of the Babylonian diaspora and demands: “Moreover, let the gold and
41 silver vessels of the house of God that Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and
42 brought to Babylon be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem” (**Ezra 6:5**
43 NRSVUE).

44
45 **Leviticus 25** describes the sabbatical year, occurring every seven years and the Jubilee year,
46 occurring in the 50th year, after each 7 times 7 years, when debts are forgiven, and land is
47 returned to its ancestral owner. This edict is mentioned in the Christian scriptures, appearing in
48 **Luke 4:19**, “the year of the Lord’s favor.”

49
50 **Luke 19:8** continues the Hebrew tradition of restitution and return through the story of
51 Zacchaeus who reports, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I
52 have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (NRSVUE).

53
54 We take these expressions of sacrifice, compensation, restitution, and return to serve as a
55 Biblical foundation for the principle of Reparations.

56 **THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING**

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58
59 In each instance of repair demonstrated in the section, Biblical Grounding, freedom from
60 enslavement is not adequate to achieve God’s call to restitution and repair. Meaningful
61 compensation and genuine change of behavior are required to satisfy God’s call to justice.

62
63 The ministry of the one we follow, Jesus the Christ, speaking in the tradition of the prophets of
64 Israel that was his tradition, called his followers to a project of political transformation against
65 empire and toward restorative justice, including the forgiveness of debts and equitable
66 distribution of resources, as it was in the prayer he taught his followers, “On Earth as it is in
67 Heaven.”

68
69 We find the call to reparations to be inextricably linked to our theology of a just God and God’s
70 son, Jesus the Christ, who offers the world a coming of God’s realm where, to paraphrase Paul,
71 all things may become new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**), but this new creation is only available through
72 reconciliation. We must reconcile ourselves to each other before we reconcile ourselves to God.

73 **HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CURRENT ENGAGEMENT**

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75
76 The institution of slavery is internationally recognized as a crime for which there is no statute of
77 limitations (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court July 1, 2002),¹ and the
78 enslavement of Africans fueled the prosperity of our young nation, allowing its economy to reap
79 the benefits of unpaid labor of untold value.² Together, these realities call us toward the work of
80 restitution, reparatory justice, and reparations.

81

82 We submit that reparations is a process to remember, repair, restore, make amends for wrongs,
83 reconcile, and can never be singularly reducible to monetary terms; is an historical reckoning
84 involving acknowledgment that an offense against humanity was committed and the victims have
85 not received justice. This Resolution and its support of the Commission to Study and Develop
86 Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act is intended to urge study of this vitally
87 important issue, and accordingly, will refine the definition of reparations and propose solutions.
88

89 Resisting racism, supporting truth telling and reconciliation, and advancing racial justice shares a
90 long history of examination and call to action in the United Church of Christ. The UCC affirms
91 in its bylaws (Section 261) that the Church in all its expressions is encouraged to speak
92 prophetically on matters of justice, power, and public policy; to confront expressions of injustice
93 and alienation in the Church and in society.³
94

95 An early statement of support for advancing racial justice from the United Church of Christ was
96 issued in 1991 in the form of a Pastoral Letter, *Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Role of the*
97 *Church*. Reporting on this letter, the *Washington Post* noted, “The statement on racism is the
98 third pastoral issued in 30 years by the United Church of Christ.”⁴ That letter stated, “We
99 emphatically reject the notion that racism, particularly in the form of institutionalized
100 discrimination, is a problem that no longer requires our utmost attention.”⁵
101

102 One decade following the 1991 Pastoral Letter, at the 23rd General Synod of the United Church
103 of Christ (2001), the Church meaningfully engaged in a ministry of Reparatory Justice and
104 Reparations, signaled by the adoption of the Resolution, “A Call for Study on Reparations for
105 Slavery.”⁶ An outcome of this work was presented at the 24th General Synod of the United
106 Church of Christ (2003), including the study and discussion guide, “*Reparations: A Process for*
107 *Repairing the Breach*.”⁷
108

109 Yet despite this resource, little wider church engagement was achieved. Again, in 2008, in
110 support of Sacred Conversations to End Racism, the UCC Collegium issued *The Pastoral Letter*
111 *on Racism* that articulated “the challenges and opportunities of a Sacred Conversation at this
112 time in our nation’s history and the life of our church.”⁸ This letter affirmed, “As members of the
113 United Church of Christ, we have a rich history of spirited resistance to racism that can serve as
114 both a resource and an inspiration for this sacred work.”⁹
115

116 Meanwhile on the national stage, the late Rep. Conyers Jr. (D MI-13) introduced to the 115th
117 Congress of the United States (2017-2018), the *Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for*
118 *African Americans Act*, a bill to study and create proposals for Reparations that incorporated the
119 latest legal and societal discussions concerning the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade and focused on
120 reparations remedies.¹⁰
121

122 In the wake of Rep. Conyers passing, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D TX-18) introduced
123 into the first session of the 117th Congress (2021-2022), the *Commission to Study Reparation*
124 *Proposals for African Americans Act*.¹¹ The stated purpose of this Act is to address the
125 fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the
126 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865, and to establish a commission to study and
127 consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its

128 subsequent *de jure* and *de facto* racial and economic discrimination against African Americans,
129 and the lingering negative effects of slavery on living African Americans and society, to make
130 recommendations to the Congress of the United States on appropriate remedies, and for other
131 purposes.¹²

132
133 The UCC expressed its support for this Act. In April 2021, an article prepared by the United
134 Church of Christ supported the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African
135 Americans Act, “UCC Leaders Laud Historic Legislation on Reparations, Heading to House
136 Vote.”¹³

137
138 In Spring 2022, the Reparatory Justice and Reparations ministry of the United Church of Christ
139 launched a new interactive educational web-based platform with resources, with webinars and
140 toolkits for the ongoing work leading to strategies with recommendations implementing a long-
141 term reparations plan within the United Church of Christ.¹⁴

142
143 The current United Church of Christ National Setting campaign, *Join the Movement*, reports,
144 “The Christian church began as a movement towards a just world through the teachings of Jesus.
145 As followers of Jesus, we believe it is our mandate to work for and seek justice, love, and
146 compassion, as we join with and become our own Spirit-led movements toward racial justice.”¹⁵

147
148 This is a *Kairos* moment in the life of the Church, and we urge the wider church to join the
149 movement toward Reparatory Justice and Reparations.

150
151 Considering its genesis with the 1991 *Pastoral Letter*, the third Letter of its kind after the
152 forming of the UCC, then to the 23rd and 24th General Synods, where first a Reparations
153 Resolution was adopted and a Reparations study guide presented, respectively (2001; 2003); the
154 further call for truth and reconciliation through a *Pastoral Letter* in support of Sacred
155 Conversations (2008); support of the *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals*
156 *for African Americans Act* (2021); and most recently, the Join the Movement Capital Campaign
157 (2022), we are persuaded of the urgency of this moment to join the work of generations in the
158 long struggle of racial justice, including Reparatory Justice and Reparations. In joining this
159 struggle, we align ourselves with the language, direction, and call of the United Church of Christ
160 on this issue for more than three decades.

161
162 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

163
164 WHEREAS the institution of slavery is internationally recognized as a crime for which there is
165 no statute of limitations.¹⁶

166
167 WHEREAS the enslavement of Africans fueled the prosperity of our young nation, allowing its
168 economy to reap the benefits of unpaid labor of untold value.¹⁷

169
170 WHEREAS the ministry of the One we follow, Jesus, speaking in the tradition of the prophets of
171 Israel that was his tradition, called his followers to a project of political transformation to a God-
172 centered society, including forgiveness of debts and equitable distribution of resources.

173

174 WHEREAS we fervently strive to enact the prayer Jesus taught his followers, “On Earth as it is
175 in Heaven.”

176
177 WHEREAS the United Church of Christ affirms in its bylaws (Justice and Witness Ministries
178 section 268) that the Church in all its expressions is encouraged to speak prophetically on
179 matters of justice, power, and public policy; to confront expressions of injustice and alienation in
180 the Church and in society.

181
182 WHEREAS in 1991, the United Church of Christ issued the *Pastoral Letter on Racism and the*
183 *Role of the Church*¹⁸ that called the Church to advance issues of racial justice.

184
185 WHEREAS at the 23rd General Synod of the United Church of Christ (2001), the Synod adopted
186 the Resolution, “A Call for Study on Reparations for Slavery.”¹⁹

187
188 WHEREAS at the 24th General Synod of the United Church of Christ (2003), Executive
189 Minister Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson presented the study and discussion guide, *Reparations: A*
190 *Process for Repairing the Breach*.²⁰

191
192 WHEREAS in 2008, the UCC Collegium issued *The Pastoral Letter on Racism* that articulated
193 “the challenges and opportunities of a Sacred Conversation at this time in our nation’s history
194 and the life of our church.”²¹

195
196 WHEREAS the late Rep. Conyers Jr. (D MI-13) introduced to the 115th Congress of the United
197 States (2017-2018), the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.²²

198
199 WHEREAS in the wake of Rep. Conyers passing, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D TX-18)
200 introduced into the first session of the 117th Congress (2021-2022), the Commission to Study
201 Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act²³.

202
203 WHEREAS in April 2021, United Church of Christ leaders supported the Commission to Study
204 Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, publishing, “UCC Leaders Laud Historic
205 Legislation on Reparations, Heading to House Vote²⁴.”

206
207 WHEREAS in 2022, the United Church of Christ launched the *Join the Movement*²⁵ campaign that
208 stated, in part, “As followers of Jesus, we believe it is our mandate to work for and seek justice,
209 love, and compassion, as we join with and become our own Spirit-led movements toward racial
210 justice.”

211
212 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
213 Christ publicly proclaims its support of the *Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for*
214 *African Americans Act* and like-legislation that mirrors Section 3 of the Commission to Study
215 Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act “Establishment and Duties” (a) Establishment:
216 There is established the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African
217 Americans.

218

219 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
220 Christ encourages all settings of the United Church of Christ to study the *Commission to Study*
221 *Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act* and like legislation that mirrors Section 3 of the
222 *Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act* “Establishment and
223 Duties (a) Establishment: There is established the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation
224 Proposals for African Americans”.

225
226 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
227 Christ requests that the United Church of Christ Board support ongoing commitments to further a
228 ministry of Reparatory Justice and Reparations.

229
230 BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of
231 Christ requests that the United Church of Christ Board form a Reparations Legislative Task
232 Force, with partnership of the United Church of Christ Washington DC Office and the
233 Reparatory Justice and Reparations Ministry of the United Church of Christ National setting,
234 including an open call to all settings of the UCC for participation, to monitor and communicate
235 legislative actions for A Call for the Study of Reparations for African Americans Act and to
236 design and develop an advocacy toolkit made available for all settings of the UCC to ask
237 members of Congress to take-up the Act for floor debate and ultimately to pass the Call for the
238 Study of Reparations for African Americans Act.

239 240 **FUNDING**

241 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
242 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

243 244 **IMPLEMENTATION**

245 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
246 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>

² <https://naacp.org/resources/reparations-unpaid-labor-rendered-enslaved-persons-african-descent-0>

³ http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1093/Bylaws.pdf?1418424538

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1991/01/12/church-of-christ-urges-action-against-racism/fdd1e153-3a74-44ba-9e24-f67db81aa66f/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALL-FOR-STUDY-ON-REPARATIONS-FOR-SLAVERY.pdf>

⁷

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/552a993ce4b0c842cdb585ad/t/627d92037f6d991914a0528a/1652396549042/Reparations+A+Process+for+Repairing+the+Breach.pdf>

⁸ https://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation_sacred-conversation-resources/

⁹ http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/388/Pastoral-Letter-on-Racism-NEW-small.pdf?1418423752

¹⁰ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/40>

¹¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40/titles>

¹² <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr40/BILLS-117hr40ih.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.ucc.org/ucc-leaders-laud-historic-legislation-on-reparations-heading-to-house-vote/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ucc.org/repairing-the-breach/>

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- ¹⁵ <https://jointhemovementucc.org/>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>
- ¹⁷ <https://naacp.org/resources/reparations-unpaid-labor-rendered-enslaved-persons-african-descent-0>
- ¹⁸ http://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/388/Pastoral-Letter-on-Racism-NEW-small.pdf?1418423752
- ¹⁹ <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALL-FOR-STUDY-ON-REPARATIONS-FOR-SLAVERY.pdf>
- ²⁰ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/552a993ce4b0c842cdb585ad/t/627d92037f6d991914a0528a/1652396549042/Reparations+A+Process+for+Repairing+the+Breach.pdf>
- ²¹ http://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/388/Pastoral-Letter-on-Racism-NEW-small.pdf?1418423752
- ²² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/40>
- ²³ [https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20House%20\(01%2F04%2F2021\)&text=This%20bill%20establishes%20the%20Commission,present%20and%20recommend%20appropriate%20remedies.](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20House%20(01%2F04%2F2021)&text=This%20bill%20establishes%20the%20Commission,present%20and%20recommend%20appropriate%20remedies.)
- ²⁴ <https://www.ucc.org/ucc-leaders-laud-historic-legislation-on-reparations-heading-to-house-vote/>
- ²⁵ <https://jointhemovementucc.org/>