

Diocesan Restorative Justice Report 2017

Submitted by Deacon Brad Taylor- Diocesan Restorative Justice Coordinator

What is Restorative Justice? Restorative justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders. This can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities. Practices and programs reflecting restorative purposes will respond to crime by:

- identifying and taking steps to repair harm,
- involving all stakeholders, and
- transforming the traditional relationship between communities and their governments in responding to crime.

What is a Catholic vision and understanding of Restorative Justice?

Pope Francis stated, “God is in everyone’s life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, even if it is destroyed by vices, drugs or anything else—God is in this person’s life.” (La Civiltà Cattolica September 2013).

The Catholic approach to criminal justice reform and rehabilitative justice begins with the recognition of the life and dignity of all persons: those who are victims of crime, but also the offenders who have caused harm.

Thus, a Catholic approach to prison ministry begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender and incorporates a biblical based vision of restorative justice.

.Jesus Christ, who was both a prisoner and victim for our sake, continue to calls us to be engaged in prison ministry as a core part of our common baptismal vocation.

Restorative Justice Week will be held in Canada, and throughout the world, from **November 19-26, 2017**. The theme for the week is **Inspiring Innovation**. (For details see the CSC RJ Website: <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorative-justice/003005-2000-eng.shtml>).

For more information please contact:

Deacon Brad Taylor

Site Based Chaplain Saskatchewan Penitentiary

Diocesan Restorative Justice Coordinator

1415 4th West Prince Albert Saskatchewan S6V 5H1 (o) 306-765-8178 (cell) 306-960-3112

Email: restorativejustice@padiocese.ca

Opportunities to get involved in a Restorative Justice Ministry:

Are you willing to become a....

1. **Catholic Prison Chapel volunteer** to offer pastoral care, catechism, adult faith formation and weekly chapel services.
2. **CSC non-security escort** to bring a Catholic inmate to Sunday Mass like several St. Joseph Parish member's who takes approved Catholic inmates on non-security escorts to the Parish's morning Mass.

3. Parkland Restorative Justice volunteer: Parkland Restorative Justice (PRJ):

Mission: A faith based, charitable organization that seeks to create safe communities by following the principles of [restorative justice](#) in helping offenders reintegrate into the community. <http://www.parklandrestorativejustice.ca>

Director: Heather Driedger.

Phone: (306) 763-6224

Email: parklandrestorativejustice.ca

We are excited to let you know about our ministries:

- **Person to Person Inmate Visitation Volunteer Program (P2P):** P2P seeks to restore offenders to wholeness and the community, through a friendship-based program of visitation and reintegration.
- **Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)** CoSA's were developed as a restorative justice response to the fear and outcry of the Canadian public's reaction to the release of high-risk sexual offenders. A CoSA is comprised of a "core member," the high-risk released sexual offender, and 3 - 4 capable volunteers who commit themselves to an intense relationship of supportive friendship with the core member. "No More Victims" is the primary goal of CoSA, as well as healthy reintegration into the community, and each core member must commit himself to this.
- **Forward Step Ministry:** Forward Step is offered in collaboration with Parkland Restorative Justice, Micah Mission Faith Community Reintegration Project/COSA in Saskatoon and the Faith Community Reintegration Project/COSA in Regina. We meet every weekly with a small group of prisoners at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary Medium Security Chapel to support the inmate while he is in prison and to assist him in his pre-release planning by making supportive community connections.

The Journey of a Feather by Peter Oliver

From the Prairie Messenger Catholic Journal 08/31/2016

Among many Aboriginal people the eagle feather communicates respect, humility, courage and wisdom.

Several years ago I received an eagle feather as a sign of appreciation for my ministry at the prison in Saskatoon. I was honoured but troubled because the feather did not feel like it belonged to me. I brought my concerns to Harry Lafond (Muskeg Lake Cree Nation and executive director at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner). Harry received me graciously and heard my story. He then explained, “You are the carrier of the feather. One day you will meet the feather’s owner and you will give it to him.”

I would like to tell you about my meeting with the person to whom the feather belongs, but first revisit with me the events of June 26, 2002. On that day two men broke into Jo Oliver’s home and brutally assaulted her. One of them attacked her with an axe, cutting off her ear. As she lay bleeding on the floor, they stepped over her as they carried the contents of her home out the door. The younger man kicked her as they passed.

The incident left in its wake a tremendous amount of fear and pain. Arrests and convictions followed. About two years later the older of the two men was designated a dangerous offender. This is the most extreme designation any person can receive in the Canadian justice system. Once designated a dangerous offender, the person is rarely released from prison.

Jo Oliver is my mother, and I work for an organization called Micah Misson. We promote restorative justice by reaching out to ex-prisoners, but we have never tackled the realities experienced by victims of crime.

The adage “lead by example” speaks to me, so I contacted Alan Edwards from Restorative Opportunities, a program sponsored by Corrections Services Canada. I asked him to set up a mediated encounter with Mervin, one of my mother’s assailants. He was the man who was designated a dangerous offender. Numerous meetings, calls and emails followed as Alan worked with my family and Mervin.

Gradually, we discovered the steps involved in the process. Alan explained that there were many ways a mediated encounter could happen. We could communicate through letter, video or we could meet with Mervin in person. We learned that we could involve as many people as we like (I come from a large family) and we could take as much time as we needed. We were invited to be as creative as we liked and the mediators supported us by attending to the many human and practical issues involved in setting up a meeting of this kind.

As the process unfolded we were encouraged to find that the mediators would take time to get to know Mervin. They assured us a meeting would not be set up with Mervin until they were confident he was ready for such a meeting.

One of the first steps we took was to ask Mervin to write his autobiography. We wanted to know more about him. What kind of life led to such destructive behavior? He willingly shared his story: 14 foster care homes before he was 12; no father; years in prison; Aboriginal and German heritage. He enjoys reading! The young offender who accompanied Mervin on the night of the

break-in had taken his life a few years later. Bits and pieces of his story began to form a coherent narrative.

We were also surprised to find that in the 12 years Alan had worked with Restorative Opportunities they had never been asked to organize an encounter at the Prince Albert Penitentiary. Imagine: there are 700 men incarcerated at the penitentiary and no one had ever gone to the penitentiary to meet with any of them to talk about the offences that led to their incarceration.

As my family came to know more about the process and who Mervin was as person, we decided a meeting with him in the penitentiary was exactly what we wanted. Alan explained that they always engage two mediators in the kind of encounter we were planning, so we were introduced to his colleague, Jennifer Haslett.

A great deal of discussion followed as we decided who and how many family members would participate. In the end, my brother Diccon, my wife Madeline, my mother and I made the trip to the Prince Albert Penitentiary. Brad Taylor, one of the penitentiary chaplains, joined us. Coincidentally, Brad and his family had also been staying with us when we received news that Mom had been assaulted.

At our request, the meeting format was a sharing circle. The non-confrontational nature of the circle allowed us to tell our stories, hear Mervin's story, speak our truths and weep. Mervin listened, did his best to answer some questions and apologized.

During a short intermission in our sharing, my family was given some private time to talk about our experience. We all agreed that Mervin had received us into his life and we felt the sincerity of his apology. I proposed giving my eagle feather to Mervin as a sign that we recognized the genuineness of his apology. I suggested that Mom should be the one to give him the feather.

When we returned to the circle, I shared the story of the feather and the guidance given by Harry Lafond. I told Mervin that I believed the feather belonged to him. Handing the feather to my mother, I invited her to give it to him. Then, in an act of reconciliation, Mom crossed the room, offered Mervin the feather and gave him a hug.

A few weeks later, Mom received a letter from Mervin. He expressed his gratitude for the meeting with my family and spoke of an inexplicable joy that had come over him following our encounter. Mom was very pleased to receive the letter and plans to write to him. My wife and I have shared the story many times of our encounter with Mervin now and we have been touched by the warmth and goodwill it inspires.

The people with whom we share the story say we have acted courageously. That may be true, but I am more impressed by the fortitude of the man who owned up to his part in assaulting my mother. When he joined the circle he was utterly alone — a man condemned, disregarded and forgotten. He had no idea what we would say or how we would treat him. He came simply and vulnerably. He spoke sincerely and took responsibility for his behavior.

He apologized without making excuses or bemoaning the punishment of prison and, in doing so, he demonstrated more humility, courage and respect than I have seen in a long time. I believe the feather has found its home.

Oliver works in chaplaincy and development for The Micah Mission in Saskatoon