

April 2016



MICAHA NEWSLETTER

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8)

TO ACT JUSTLY AND TO LOVE MERCY AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

By: Peter Oliver



In our work to promote Restorative Justice, we are present to two realities: **first**, love, more than any other virtue, is the motive and agent for growth in people's lives and

second, the single most absent reality in the criminal justice system is love.

Since healing, reconciliation, safety and accountability occur only in the context of a community that has as its centre, love, and since faith communities are charged with a mission to transform the world through actions that find expression in love, we believe faith communities need to be involved in transforming the justice system.

If love is to be an effective agent of change in the criminal justice system, we need to understand the vision of justice proposed by a restorative approach. Questions that seek a response to the key dimensions of the harm done by crime can help us discover that vision.

In his book, *Changing Lenses*, Howard Zehr identifies six guiding questions that can help clarify our vision and our response. When a criminal act occurs, he suggests we ask:

- Who has been hurt?
- What are their needs?
- Whose obligations are these?
- What are the causes?
- Who has a stake in the situation?
- What is the appropriate process to involve stakeholders in an effort to address causes and put things right?^[1]

These question can be contrasted with those asked by traditional criminal justice:

- What laws have been broken?
- Who did it?
- What do the offender(s) deserve?^[2]

Most people agree that the traditional form of justice has merit but it is important to recognize that this model of justice has the law as a central focus. By contrast, the point of departure for a

*Micah believes in the power of transformative justice
to build peaceful and faithful communities.*

*From our foundation in many churches we are committed to restoring individuals and communities
to caring and respectful relationships in the wake of harm.*

*We believe that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people and their families
must be spiritually supported in this often profoundly difficult journey.*

restorative approach is relationship. In a restorative process the first question asked is, “who has been hurt”? The primary question is not the issue of a broken law but rather concern about relationships that have been harmed.

At Micah, we invite faith communities into the work of restorative justice because we recognize that love provides an indispensable foundation that allows us to ask the relational questions suggested by Howard Zehr. Faith communities also manifest a deep respect for law and this balanced approach to law and love make real accountability and healing possible.

1. Zehr, Howard. *Changing Lenses – A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Scottsdale PA: 2005 (3rd ed), 271.
2. Zehr, Howard. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002

Volunteer Appreciation Event

In January, it was a pleasure to welcome our volunteers to an afternoon gathering at the MCC Centre in Saskatoon. The event was our opportunity to express deep appreciation for the many things that Micah volunteers do for those who have been harmed by crime.



John Yoder spoke, sharing his experiences in the CoSA program. Courtney Zerk told us about her experiences and learnings as she interviewed P2P volunteers and prepared her report (available soon on our website). Jeffrey Rousay told us about his involvement with the *Forward Step* program. And Dave and Peter updated everyone on Micah activities over the last year among faith groups, in programming, and financial development.



The afternoon was an opportunity to honour our long time volunteer and board member Eric Olfert.

Eric’s contribution to the work at Micah would take a book to write about. We deeply value his wisdom, experience and gentle guidance.

It is true to say that “We Walk in the Shadow of Giants” and our gathering was also a time to remember four giants:

Herman and Anne Guenther served with Person 2 Person, beginning in Prince Albert for about 10 years, and then more recently in Saskatoon. Herman had a wonderful sense of humour and was greatly appreciated by those he visited. A recent arrival at RPC was saddened to hear of his passing as he had hoped to reconnect with Herman and Anne. Herman passed away on April 29th, 2013.

Peter Hiebert was a visitor with P2P for about 20 years in Prince Albert and he and his son Paul also visited at RPC for a short time. They had just begun visiting with someone new prior to Peter's death. This patient took Peter's death rather hard and just recently mentioned that he still thinks of him and Paul. Peter passed away suddenly on January 7, 2014.

Arthur Wiens visited with P2P for over 20 years. For many of those years, participation meant a trip into Saskatoon from Herschel and then Rosetown. Art visited for some time with a young man who had some rather strong ideas that didn't exactly jive with his outlook. They had some "interesting" discussions around world events, especially as the related to the end times. They both seemed to enjoy the debate. Art passed away on April 30, 2014.

And what would a gathering of friends and colleagues be without good food? Yes... there was lots to munch on. And good visiting flowed.

Our thanks goes out to MCC for contributing the meeting room (and kitchen) to host this event. What a great place!

And thanks to the volunteers who helped to arrange and hold the event. There's always lots of chairs to move, tables to arrange, dishes to do...

Indeed. Thanks everybody!



Volunteer with Micah?

Do you know someone who might be interested in volunteering?
They are invited to join our volunteers in making a difference in someone's life.

There are people in our prisons who never have any visits.
There are people who need good support to help them reintegrate into society without re-offending.

Talk with others in your congregation or faith community about befriending someone who is looking to reintegrate without re-offending. Then give us a call or send us an email.

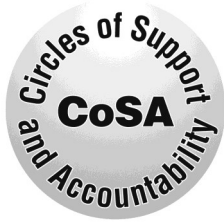
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My Experience in CoSA*

By John Yoder



I have been volunteering in CoSAs for a little over two years now and have been involved with three core members over that time period. Some may be wondering what the CoSA experience involves and if the program is effective. I would like

to share a few observations from my involvement with CoSA in the hope that perhaps something of my experience may resonate with others who are considering involvement with this worthy program.

Comradery

I must admit that I was a bit skeptical when I first joined a CoSA wondering what good this would actually do in the life of someone who has just been released from prison. Especially since it appeared that we were merely to meet and chat. I found myself asking, "How will a weekly coffee and group chat help an individual get back on their feet and prevent further offenses?"

What I found is that in comradery, we began to find or build commonality. Oh sure, the first couple of meetings were a bit stiff and less than relaxing, but that changed soon enough. There are things that happen in the meetings every week that produce some intangible yet very real relational effects. It is in the weekly comradery of conversation and accountability that seeds of trust and compassion are planted.

Compassion

I sensed that we began to develop a sense of compassion for each other within the group and not all of it was directed toward the core member. In the Circle, we began to sense community and loyalty developed out of that. I noticed that all of us took an interest in each other's lives and although we were focused on assisting the Core Member to reintegrate with the local community, we were all moving toward friendship.

Friendship

Through the shared experience of our weekly meetings and working through the difficulties facing the core member, we actually developed friendships. As we encouraged through the low times by being a listening ear or offering practical

knowledge and resources, we also experienced the joy of the same things being reciprocated, by the core member.

I remember the joy and the surprise when a core member took it upon himself to personally take an interest in a problem that I had shared with the group. This told me that he was beginning to see me as a friend and not merely a fixture in a program he was taking. It was another step in his healing and rebuilding process to be able to reach out and touch another person's life for the good.

Broader Experience

I have experienced much by way of working inside the Correctional System both in Canada in the United States, but CoSA has been my first real experience working closely with someone who is rebuilding their life from the ground up on the outside. It has been really eye-opening to see the incredible odds that face our friends as they are released and attempt to begin a new life.

I have been challenged and inspired to see the incredible courage with which many of the core members meet the difficulties of starting over. These are things few of us need to face, and so it is not surprising if we are ignorant of them in the life of another person. However, they are mountains and seeing this helped me to begin understanding how, in general, our current release policies set individuals up for failure. In many ways it is like telling an individual to scale a mountain but forcing them to start below sea level.

Some may say it is not the fault of the system that an individual is starting his climb from the bottom of a hole. It would be a waste of my time to argue that. It may also be argued that many of our core members have dug the holes out of which they need to climb. However, this is not a justification to leave them there. For me, as a follower of Jesus Christ, this behooves me to climb into the pit and assist these individuals in the climb regardless of whose fault this is or who dug the pit. CoSA became a ladder which enabled me to reach into another's situation and

allowed both of us to climb out and to keep climbing.

So then the challenges include finding safe and adequate housing in an area that will not suck the individual back into an old lifestyle. The first several weeks after release are pretty intense as the homeless shelters and transitional housing are populated by many of the temptations and negative influences a released offender must avoid to maintain the conditions of parole. Yet these housing conditions are the first (and sometimes only) available options until the individual is able to get a job and collect an income.

Then there is the branding that follows a released offender. It is hard to overcome the “prison” on their employment and social record. CoSA provides a group of friends who stand with an individual in spite of the brand. It is a group that can encourage and support through the many painful rejections that come. Some of the most painful results of the “branding” are the lack of trust and suspicion. It is amazing how demoralizing this can be.

Getting a job is always considered a first priority but it is here that the core member faces the “Catch 22’s” of limited finances, available work, and radius of travel allowed by conditions of parole. Working through these frustrating issues opens opportunities to show love and support for the core member.

In one case, the situation was literally impossible for the individual to work around. He had work in construction and the job was outside of the city. The starter went out on his car. He didn’t have money to buy a starter and without it he couldn’t get to work. Without work, he was unable to make the money to buy the starter and fix his car. The more days he didn’t work, the further he went into a hole financially. Such a small thing for many of us, but it held the potential for becoming the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. It was at this point that we stepped in and provided a starter and the situation was resolved. However, without a CoSA, this individual could have been moved to do something desperate or perhaps just give up.

This broader experience is still a work in progress for me. I am still learning and growing. I entered the CoSA with the idea of making a difference in another's life, but I am finding that it has challenged and stretched me to grow. In all, I would recommend the CoSA experience. It may not be for everyone, but I do believe that it has been a great benefit in my life. It is a worthwhile investment of your time and energy. You may think you are investing in another, but you will find that the investment brings returns to your life as well.

In Christ,

John

John Yoder, Director of Ministry, Gospel Echoes Team Association, Canada West

*CoSA = Circle of Support and Accountability

THANK YOU to all of our volunteers and donors!

We couldn’t do it without you!

A Story from Our Journey

By Dave Feick

Last spring, a young man came into the chaplain's office at SCC (Saskatoon Correctional Centre). He was rather distraught, kicking himself for being incarcerated when he should be at home taking care of his mom. She'd had surgery and because he had been arrested, he was not there to even take her home from the hospital.

We arranged for him to make a phone call home to his mom to see how things were going. After the call, he continued to tell his story. His mom owned the local hotel and it needed a new roof. He should be there to replace it. He had all the materials but because he had been working as much as he could to pay the bills, he hadn't had the time.



When I found out where he was from, I asked him if he would be open to people from the community helping with the roofing. He said that he would appreciate that. Well, I said "I know that community. I know people in the church there and I'm sure that they would want to help out. I will contact them."

When I emailed the pastor, she said that the people in the community were aware of the situation and were providing support for the mom in her illness and recuperation. They had been wondering how to help with the building and were pleased to hear that the family was open to receiving assistance from them.

The young man's charges never seemed to be severe enough for him to get sentenced for more than the time he had served on remand. While at the institution, he joined our *Forward Step* program and appreciated the support he received there. It was my hope that support for him in the community might go beyond helping with the roof and his mom's recovery.

That August, the community held a work bee and contributed money. They put a new roof on the hotel and there was enough money left over to buy eaves troughs and to help out his mom with some of her expenses.

This past month, I received an email from a member of the church community. In it he stated that the young man had showed up in church on Sunday with his son. This person and his wife had lunch together with the father and son and talked about how things were going.

The young man's life circumstances seem to still be somewhat undefined. There were questions around custody of his son. He is self-employed but his skills are a bit suspect which may result in a shortage of work. He also acknowledged his failed attempts to remain free of legal interventions in his life but is determined to keep trying.

He continues to help his mother in the midst of her health issues and the operation of the hotel. He brought a Bible with him to church (which few of the congregational members do) and talked about working on an on-line Bible study.

The church member asked if he remembered me from the prison, which he did, and told him that we help to provide supports for people released from prison. He recalled being part of our *Forward Step* group at SCC and said that he would be interested in having that kind of support in the community. Thus, the reason for the church member to contact me. We are currently in the process of working with the congregation and community to provide support for him.

It is great to see the interest in the community and to see what can result from a phone call or email introduction. This story is also a reminder that it can often be a longer process than we might like, but plans come together in God's time. We look forward to what may be in store for this young man and this community.

A PRAYER

Lord we pray for all who are caught
in the web of violence, crime and incarceration.

We pray for all those who are held captive, the guilty
and the innocent, and those who keep watch over them.

May justice and mercy prevail
behind the walls of the prisons and in the justice system itself.

We pray for those harmed by crime, their families,
and those who work to support them in the healing of body, mind, and spirit.

Nourish and strengthen them
so they may live full lives free of hurt, mistrust and hate.

God of Grace,
teach us to treat people with the love and mercy
that you show to everyone by your living example.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Justice and Outreach Year of Formation (J.O.Y.) Launched in Saskatoon Diocese

A hands-on formation program will begin this September in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon. From September to June, JOY will cover a multitude of social justice themes. Learning and prayer will be part of the process, but there will be a strong emphasis on practical experience and hands-on service, linking Catholic social teaching with the real-life challenges experienced by people living on the margins.

As part of the commitment to the program, participants will be asked to undertake a field placement in an area of service or outreach that they feel called to. It will involve an estimated commitment of about two hours a week, in addition to the JOY program gatherings that will take place monthly on a Friday evening and all day Saturday.

For more information, visit the diocesan website at www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/joy or contact O'Gorman at the Catholic Pastoral Centre in Saskatoon.

THE WAY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE UNFOLDS

By Peter Oliver

Restorative justice has brought new light and vision to the way justice processes unfold. Central to this vision are the needs of people who have been harmed by criminal acts. Working toward a more holistic approach to justice is an arduous endeavour and at this point we can only glimpse the first few dawning rays of that healthier reality.



The emphasis of our current justice system focuses on criminal acts as a violation of the law, an offence against the state. To be fair to this system, the focus on objectivity that it intends is an improvement over the impulsive and vengeful justice of the mob that still prevails in some quarters. Still for every two steps forward, it seems there must be a step backwards. The emphasis on objectivity (i.e. facts not feelings) has also created a process where the person who has been harmed become little more than a spectator in a courtroom drama, a production that has little connection with the heart ache experienced by the persons who have been harmed.

This ends up being a lose / lose situation because the persons who have been harmed leave the justice process feeling confused, ignored and betrayed; meanwhile, the person who has done the harm is sheltered from experiencing the implications of his or her actions and this becomes a barrier to growth. Instead of paying attention to the harm, the accused person spends precious time trying to negotiate a settlement that will minimize the amount of punishment doled out. Still efforts are being made to correct these imbalances and those efforts are quite fruitful.

Recently, my family initiated a mediation process that is facilitated through the Restorative Opportunities program coordinated by Correctional Services Canada. This service allows people who have been harmed by a criminal act to meet with the person who has done the harm. The process is completely voluntary for both the person who has done the harm and the persons who have been harmed. Prisoners cannot use any aspect of the process to reduce their sentence or increase the probability of parole.

The process unfolds through a series of steps. The facilitator meets with each party separately a number of times and then, when both parties are ready, a face to face meeting is organized. The process takes a good deal of commitment and goodwill on all sides but I have been quite encouraged by the

results so far.

In our case the offence involved two men breaking into my mother's home and attacking her. My mother was seriously harmed as one of the men struck her with an axe severing her ear and causing a concussion. Both men were arrested immediately after the event and one of them was sentenced as a Dangerous Offender. (The implications of this sentence are that he will likely never leave prison). The trauma of the break-in was, perhaps, more extreme than my mother's physical injuries. She had just moved into Saskatoon from a small town, following the death of my father, and this experience left her with a permanent sense of insecurity about her safety in her new home.

As the mediation process unfolds, the facilitator who is working with us, related the content of his first visit with the person who committed the offence – I'll call him M. He shared that M confessed to a deep sense of shame and embarrassment about the offence and that he immediately agree to engage in a process that would result in meeting face to face.

Unlike the proceedings that take place in our courts, the emphasis here is on how we feel and on communicating the harm that has been done. This is essential to healing and transformation. M can never turn the clock back and remove the offence but encountering him in his humanity helps us to see that the attack was not the work of a cruel indifferent person. There is some peace in knowing that he cares about the harm he has done. I also believe that being able to express this to the people he has harmed can lead to transformation in his life. Even though he may spend the rest of his life in prison, an inner transformation may lead to a degree of freedom that would be inaccessible without this encounter and that also brings me a sense of peace.

Supporting Micah Financially

Please consider donating to Micah.

We offer several ways to do this including online options, automatic bank transfers, and direct donations.

You can visit the donation page on our website for more information at <http://themicahmission.org/>

For more information, contact us at :micahcoordinator@gmail.com
Peter Oliver — 306-260-6213 or Dave Feick — 306-653-3099

Notice:

Micah is updating its website. Stay tuned...

If you have restorative justice stories or news to share on the site, please let us know.
It's always good to have pictures too.

Micah Board	
Sharon Wright (Board Chair), Quaker	Blake Sittler, Roman Catholic
Harry Harder, Mennonite	Josh Wallace, Mennonite
Cam Harder, Lutheran	Heather Peters, MCC SK Restorative Justice
Eric Olfert, Mennonite	Marjorie Keyser, United Church
Glen Grismer, Mennonite	
Staff	
Peter Oliver, Roman Catholic	Dave Feick, Mennonite
Colleen Rickard, Alliance	

Our Volunteers Come from Various Faith Groups

- Mennonite**
- Mennonite Brethren in Christ**
- C3 Church**
- United Church**
- Anglican**
- Roman Catholic**
- Baptist**
- Alliance**
- Lutheran**

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our work and volunteer opportunities.

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