



## Re-visioning Justice

Mending the Social Fabric:  
People of faith and restorative justice

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

[www.csc-scc.gc.ca](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca)

# Mending the Social Fabric: People of faith and restorative justice

## What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice is a non-adversarial approach to justice that emphasizes healing in victims, meaningful accountability of offenders, and the involvement of citizens in creating healthier, safer communities. As much as possible, restorative justice involves the victim, the offender, and the community in a process that attempts to address the harm that results from crime.

Crime is a violation of people and relationships. Restorative justice works to repair this damage and promote healing and growth. It helps us to resolve conflicts in our society in more peaceful and collaborative ways.

## How does restorative justice apply to people of faith?

Restorative justice appeals to communities and people from many different walks of life. Over the years, faith communities have been particularly engaged in restorative justice. Religious leaders from a majority of faith traditions have spoken about the need for approaches to justice that promote healing and reconciliation. They have repeatedly indicated that these principles for justice can be found in the very fabric of their respective traditions and teachings. Restorative justice involves an inner shift from a mindset of punishment to one of healing. Many of these faith traditions work to intentionally build

community supports and advance a restorative approach to justice that includes addressing the harm done in our communities. At a personal level, restorative justice involves becoming the people that our faith traditions encourage us to be. It encourages the development of empathy and understanding, as well as a greater sense of how all people are connected. Restorative justice involves the challenge of loving all, even those who may seem unlovable.

People of faith can play an important role in supporting restorative justice both within their particular faith community and in the wider human network.

## How does restorative justice work?

Offender accountability is key to the success of restorative justice. Encouraging people to take responsibility for their actions can be the role of many, including prison chaplains and volunteers from numerous faith communities. The sharing of circumstances that led to a crime, an understanding of that crime's impact, and the expression of genuine remorse can be deeply healing for those involved.

Restorative justice processes are entirely voluntary and allow the time necessary for introspection and personal growth. It can have powerful effects. For example, restorative justice can:

- move accountability for offenders away from merely accepting punishment to assuming responsibility for the harm they have done, and taking action to reduce that harm;

- move victims into a more pivotal role in the justice system;
- move offenders away from being defined by their crime to being seen as capable of making amends and making a positive contribution to their community; and
- shift the focus from fault and blame to problem solving and moving forward by identifying the needs resulting from crime;

### Restorative justice processes can include:

- victim-offender mediation, where a facilitator prepares participants to communicate with one another and provides people with the opportunity to meet in a safe and structured setting;
- “surrogate” processes, where victims of certain crimes and offenders who committed similar crimes, but who are not directly linked, are brought together; and/or
- circle processes, which are rooted in Aboriginal spirituality and other traditions. These allow for many voices to be present and heard with the help of an impartial facilitator, in order to foster understanding and accountability. Circle processes can also be used in sentencing and in supporting offenders and communities to ensure effective rehabilitation and reintegration after release.

## How is restorative justice unique?

Restorative justice differs from the mainstream criminal justice you hear about every day in many ways. It moves the focus on crime away from the impersonal (breaking the law), to the personal (harm caused to individuals and communities). It is about healing that harm. Ultimately, restorative justice is about peace-making: restoring harmony to people's lives and relationships while bringing them into balance with one another and with the Divine.

## How can I learn more?

Newcomers are always welcome to share their wisdom and experience as volunteers and, in turn, to grow and be nourished in this challenging and rewarding journey of spiritual care.

### For more information,

please visit the Correctional Service of Canada's restorative justice Web site at

[www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorativejustice](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/restorativejustice).