



Justice That Heals

A Restorative Justice Study Pack

Welcome to the Churches' Criminal Justice Forum study pack on Restorative Justice. This pack is designed to cover five or six sessions. The Introduction can be used as a session in its own right, or as introductory background reading.

Each session begins with reflection on an aspect of restorative justice, and is followed by questions for group discussion. At the end of each session there are also questions for personal reflection between sessions, for restorative justice is not just about criminal behaviour but about basic human relationships that affect us all. Each session includes details of a project or initiative that demonstrates that aspect of restorative justice. There are also 'fact files' giving information about the current state of criminal justice.

Please feel free to photocopy the material. Biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

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Thanks

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1. Introduction

Almost every week in the media, the subject of our criminal justice system is high on the agenda. Politicians make strong sounding statements about being “tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime”, but little changes. We lock up more and more people, building bigger and bigger prisons and it clearly is not working. We have got ourselves into an awful spiral of blame and retribution, and we can’t seem to get ourselves out of it. To borrow another political phrase, we need to “go back to basics”.

Those of us who are people of faith, need to ask what it is that our faith demands of us and then measure our criminal justice system against it. Justice is at the very heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We share a corpus of Scripture in which the prophet Micah reminds us that what the Lord requires of us is that we:

“.....act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8)

This, sadly, is not reflected in the way in which our own society and other societies work out their criminal justice systems. Why is that? It has little to do with theology and everything to do with psychology.

We want to distance ourselves from those who break the laws by which we live so that we can say, “I am not like that.” We physically distance ourselves by locking them away in prison, so that we can forget that actually, we are all capable of breaking the law.

Distancing ourselves from others in this way is a sign of failure by the community, because it indicates a breakdown in relationships. Any breakdown in relationship diminishes individuals and communities; if we believe we are created in the image of God we are bound, by our very nature, to try to restore broken relationships.

So, what is restorative justice? It is difficult to give a succinct answer. At its heart, it is about healing broken relationships through a dynamic process. For example, when a crime is committed there is more than one person involved. There is the perpetrator, the victim and the wider community. The perpetrator has harmed the victim by his or her actions and he or she has also harmed the community by those same actions. Restorative justice attempts to heal the hurt caused to the victim but also recognises the value of the perpetrator and seeks to restore him or her to their place within the community. This involves a process in which all concerned need to be involved.

The perpetrator has to go through a process of recognising what has been done and taking steps to put right the damage caused. The victim has to go through a process of overcoming the very natural feelings about the person who has caused their suffering, to a point of wanting to understand what made that person act in the way they did. That understanding is the foundation of forgiveness and is part of the process of restoring broken relationships.

The community also has to go through a similar process. The most important aspect of this is to recognise the intrinsic value of both perpetrator and victim and to separate feelings about the crime committed from feelings about the perpetrator as a person. This is where most work has to be done in order to move from a retributive to a restorative approach.

Our current criminal justice system is based on retributive justice; that is, a crime has been committed and so someone has to be punished in order for justice to have been done.

The following figures, taken from the Home Office statistics, show how unsuccessful this approach has been. In 1964 the average prison population was 29,600. By 1974 it had risen to 38,867, by 1984 to 43,295, by 1994 to 48,621 and on 31 December 2004 to 73,214. That is a colossal rise in 40 years and it has happened despite many genuine attempts to tackle the causes of crime and to work with prisoners to avoid re-offending.

Clearly retributive justice alone does not work. The primary reason is that it compounds already fractured relationships and does little to heal them. The perpetrator of a crime, who then becomes a prisoner, frequently suffers the breakdown of marriage and family relationships. This, in turn, impacts on the community as a whole, which often ends up supporting the broken family financially through the benefits system. The victim is left feeling powerless and sometimes further abused by the system. For the community a broken relationship is compounded by distancing the perpetrator from the very community that ought to be the source of healing.

Let us remind ourselves of the foundation on which our faith is built:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.....God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:27 & 31)

Questions for discussion or personal reflection

What, in your opinion, are the main causes of crime?

If we are all created in God’s image, and therefore good, what are the influences that result in some people becoming “too evil to be part of the community”?

Prisons Week Prayer

Each year, during the third week in November, churches are asked particularly to focus upon criminal justice issues. Below is the Prisons Week Prayer; you may like to use it, each time you meet.

Lord, you offer freedom to all people.

We pray for those in prison.

Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.

Support with your love, prisoners, their families and friends, prison staff and all who care.

Heal those who have been wounded by the activities of others, especially the victims of crime.

Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in His strength and in His Spirit, now and every day.

Factfile

A snapshot of crime and the criminal justice system in England and Wales

- Crime fell by nearly 40% between 1995 and 2004
- In 2002-03, 27% of the population were victims of crime (down from a high of nearly 40% in 1995); the chance of being a victim is said to be the lowest it has been for 20 years
- Fewer than 20% of offences recorded by the police result in the offender being cautioned, convicted, or receiving some other sanction – though this proportion has been increasing since 2001
- Most criminal cases are dealt with in magistrates’ courts, usually by lay magistrates; the great majority result in a conviction
- 5% of criminal cases – usually the more serious – are dealt with in the Crown Court by a Judge and, if necessary, a Jury
- Restorative justice principles are used by most Youth Offending Teams (multi-disciplinary teams working with young offenders)
- More than a third of all men receive at least one conviction, for a reasonably serious offence, at some point in their lifetime
- There were 75,500 people in custody in May 2005; more than 12,000 of these were on remand i.e. awaiting trial or sentence. Nearly 11,000 of those in custody are under 21; more than 2,000 are under 18.
- More than 4,000 of those in custody are women; in the past ten years, the number of women in prison has more than doubled.
- England and Wales imprisons a greater proportion of the population than any other country in western Europe
- Many prisoners have significant mental health problems; seven out of ten are diagnosed as having two or more mental health disorders. (This includes serious drug or alcohol misuse)
- More than half of prisoners have a reading age no better, or poorer, than that expected of an 11-year-old
- One third of prisoners were not in settled accommodation prior to imprisonment
- Nearly two thirds of sentenced male prisoners admit to hazardous use of alcohol, which carries the risk of physical or mental harm

2. Recognition

So, what is the Biblical understanding of justice? We don't have to go very far in the Bible to discover a very good starting point. From Genesis Chapter 3:

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

“Not me guv! It wasn't me, it was her and, by the way, it was your fault because you put her here!”

“Not me either. The serpent deceived me – it was all his fault.”

Adam and Eve's responses were an archetypal denial that immediately sets up barriers in relationships. The outcome of that story was that their relationship with God was fractured and they found themselves distanced from God.

Jump forward to the story of Jesus on the cross and to Luke's version which has one of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus owning up to what he had done:

“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:41)

Adam and Eve knew that they had done wrong but they were not prepared to own up. It was someone else's fault, not theirs. They simply blamed someone else for their own wrongdoing. The result was alienation from God.

The thief on the cross also knew that he had done wrong but he was prepared to own up, and accept the punishment the law prescribed. Jesus' response to him was:

“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

The thief's relationship with Jesus was maintained because he was prepared to take that first step and own his own wrongdoing. The maintenance of that relationship was the first step in a healing process that, sadly, could not be completed in this life but offered the promise of completion in the next life.

The first step in the process of restorative justice is recognition. We have to recognise that we have done something wrong before we can move on, because refusal to do so becomes a barrier to relationships.

On 12 October 2004 a remarkable meeting took place between Patrick Magee, the man who planted the bomb at the Grand Hotel in Brighton, and Jo Berry, the daughter of one of his victims. Patrick Magee's admitted intention was to wipe out Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet. One of those killed in the blast was Sir Anthony Berry MP, Jo Berry's father. Jo met with Patrick Magee on 12 October 2004 in an event called 'Healing the Brighton Bomb' that marked the 20th anniversary of the bombing.

In an interview before the meeting Jo Berry said, “I do not see it as a betrayal. I see it as a way forward for the world where we have to solve conflict without violence. We cannot solve the problems of the world with violence.”

It is highly unlikely that Jo Berry could have agreed to that meeting if Patrick Magee had continually denied his involvement in the bombing. His openness about his part in the bombing and the reasons for it enabled her to meet with him and begin the healing process.

Patrick Magee and Jo Berry both recognised that the world had moved on in twenty years and peace, the healing of relationships, was the main item on their agenda. Recognition is not just required of the

perpetrator. It also has to happen for the victim as he or she recognises the perpetrator as a fellow human being, and for the community as it recognises his or her place within the community.

Questions for group discussion

In your experience, does it help to heal a relationship if someone who has harmed you in some way owns up?

What is the effect on a relationship of continued denial?

Questions for personal reflection

Is there anything in my life that I need to own, and for which I need to stop blaming others?

Which relationships have been damaged by my failure to do so?

What's going on?

Sycamore Tree:

- is a six-session programme, run in prisons, focusing on raising victim awareness, and based on the principles of restorative justice
- challenges attitudes and behaviour by teaching and encouraging offenders to take responsibility for their actions towards victims and the community – to **recognise** the wrong they have done, the impact it has had on others, and the need to put things right
- enables offenders to hear from 'surrogate victims' about their experiences of crime; and to reflect on the impact and harm caused, and the need for apology and reparation
- uses the story of Zacchaeus (Study 3: Reparation) as a framework
- is run at the invitation of Prison Service Chaplaincy, by trained Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers from all Christian denominations, who through prayer, practical action and values-based programmes, seek to restore those affected by crime
- has been run more than 330 times since 1999, involving four thousand prisoners in more than 25% of all prisons.

"Sycamore Tree made me realise the pain I caused to my victim, the families and myself. I wanted to take responsibility for what I had done."

..... A young offender

See the Prisons Week Prayer from Session 1.

3. Repentance

Recognition is important, but it is only the first step. The next is repentance. The thief on the cross not only recognised what he had done, he was also sorry and accepted that his punishment was just.

Jesus' response to the man was:

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

No condemnation, no casting him out because the man had recognised his wrongdoing and was repentant. Sadly, his punishment made it impossible for him to go any further because he was already dying a most horrible death. There was no time for him to turn his life around and walk in a different direction - the true meaning of repentance.

Repentance is part of a healing process. There is a story in 2 Samuel about King David and his desire for the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David saw, and desired Bathsheba so he sent for her, slept with her and she became pregnant. David's attempts to cover up his guilty secret by persuading Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife came to nothing and so David sent him into battle where he was killed. After her period of mourning was over David took Bathsheba as his wife and she gave birth to their son. The child became sick and David fasted and lay on the ground. When the child died, David's servants were afraid to tell him but David asked whether his son was dead. When he was told, he got up, washed and dressed in clean clothes and went to worship God. After this he went back to his own house to eat. When his servants asked him about his behaviour he told them that whilst the child was ill he had fasted and wept because he thought God might be gracious to him.

David showed remorse for his actions and accepted that there was a price to pay for what he had done. He knew that once his son was dead there was nothing more he could do and so he washed and dressed himself in clean clothes and went to worship God and to restore his relationship with God.

There is a difference between feeling remorse for something we have done wrong and repenting. The Parole Board requires prisoners to show remorse for their crimes before they are considered for parole. It is relatively easy for prisoners to convince the Parole Board that they are truly sorry, but being sorry is not enough, and that is why the re-offending rate is so high.

Repentance means to turn around and go the other way. Remorse might be the starting point of repentance but it is not the sum total. It is also necessary to turn away from the things that led to the crime being committed and to live life differently in the future.

J. was a young man of 28. He was in prison for drug related offences, as he had been many times before. Gradually he began to open up and tell his story. He was desperate to make something of his life but he didn't know where to start.

J's mother was a drug dealer and when J. got to the age of seven she used to send him out to do her deals. When he got to ten his reward became drugs for his own use. He soon became addicted and his life took on an all too familiar pattern of theft to support his growing drug habit. He had been in and out of prison for most of his adolescence and young adult life but he had managed to stay off drugs during this sentence and he began to feel better in himself. As he started to feel better he began to take care of himself and exercise regularly and, as he did so, he began to change. His relationships with people changed, and he wanted to build on this new way of life. J. was truly sorry about the people he had hurt by stealing from them, but he was more than just sorry. He wanted to turn his life around and do something good.

The hardest part of all was making the decision he knew he must make. J. knew that if he wanted to turn his life around he must turn his back on his mother, who was his only family. That was the cost of repentance for J. because he knew that he was not strong enough to resist his mother's pleas to help her out with her drug deals and he didn't want to go back to that life.

J. made tough decisions and worked with staff to lay the ground for his release so that he really could walk a new path. His aim was to work with children and young people to persuade them that trying illegal drugs was not a good choice. He felt he had a great deal to offer, because he could speak from experience as one who knew the pressures to conform to the drug culture and who also knew the terrible cost involved.

For J, as for many, repentance involved great personal cost because it meant turning away from old ways, and the only family he had, to set off on a new path.

Questions for group discussion

A great Jewish scholar said that you can only show your repentance is genuine if, when you are placed in the same situation as that in which you sinned, you act differently. Do you agree?

What does this say about the problems facing released prisoners?

Questions for personal reflection

When, in my own life, have I felt sufficient remorse to turn my life around and take a different path?

Is there anything in my life now, that ought to lead me to do this?

See the Prisons Week Prayer from Session 1.

What's going on?

Alpha is a 15-session course, introducing the Christian faith, designed primarily for non-churchgoers and new Christians. **Alpha for Prisons:**

- began in 1995. The Alpha course is now run in over 80% of UK prisons. More than 40,000 men and women have completed Alpha while in prison
- is motivated by the belief that, if **lives are changed by the love and forgiveness of God**, crime and re-offending will be reduced
- supports Alpha courses in all categories of prisons – run by prison chaplains, prison officers, and volunteers from local churches and other Christian organisations
- aims to give every person in prison the opportunity to attend an Alpha course
- has led to the setting-up of 'Caring for Ex-Offenders', a charity which has linked more than 500 prisoners with a supportive church on release, as well as training the churches to support them. At least 60% of these ex-offenders have avoided further conviction.

"I learned from Alpha that being a Christian can be fun. I've made the commitment to start over in Christ...The mistakes I've made are over with and I've asked God to forgive me."

..... Sheri, an ex-offender

Factfile

Re-offending

- The recent increase in the prison population is not due to an increase in the level or seriousness of crime coming before the courts. It has more to do with the likelihood that a particular type of offender (say, a first time house burglar) will be sent to prison, and in the average length of prison sentences
- This increased use of imprisonment is estimated to have reduced crime by only 5% (compared to an overall reduction in crime of 30% since 1997)
- Of those prisoners released in 1997, within two years, well over half had been convicted of another crime, and a third were back in prison
- For young men, the proportions were over two-thirds and nearly half
- Sentences served in the community, under probation supervision, are only slightly more effective in reducing re-offending. But they do cost much less than the £37,500 a year needed to keep someone in prison.

4. Reparation

There is a story in the Gospels that takes this question of justice a step further. It is a story most of us will have known since childhood and probably sung about. It is the story of Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus in Luke 19: 1-10. Read the whole of it.

“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” (Luke 19: 8)

Prison Chaplains meet many men in prison who just want to be able to put things right. They want to put something back into the community they have wronged. One group of men gave up their weekends to paint their way round a church. Week after week they missed the opportunity of visits and sport or leisure time to come out and paint their way round the premises.

One of them had worked for a bank, which he had defrauded. There was no way he could ever pay back what he had taken but, in this way, he felt that he was giving something back to the community. He could never go back to that work again because nobody would employ him so he went to college to retrain for an area of work in which he felt he could continue to repay his debt to society.

Another lad, who had been in trouble since he was six years old and in and out of prison most of his adult life, began to study sports leadership whilst in prison. It was a demanding course that involved not just knowing about particular sports but also in depth knowledge of anatomy and physiology and how to deal with sports injuries. He began to believe, for the first time in his life, that he was good at something and, through long hours of working together and exploring his past and what had gone wrong, he began to want to turn his life around and put something back.

He worked for several months, under the supervision of the PE instructor, with a young boy who had cerebral palsy. His mother would bring the boy to the prison each day and this young man and a couple of other prisoners would do intensive physiotherapy on him for several hours a day. They built a lovely relationship with the child and his mother and they encouraged her to continue the work at home. It began to pay off and the boy's muscle tone improved to the point where he could stand in the special frame the prisoners bought for him out of their earnings and through their own fundraising, and he walked for the first time in his life.

There was no way that prisoner could possibly go back and put right all the things he had done wrong in his life. He couldn't even remember half of them but he had found a real way of paying something back to the society he had harmed by his previous behaviour.

He came out of prison and went straight home to Dublin where he handed himself in because he knew he had outstanding warrants to serve in Ireland and he needed to serve his time there before he could truly be free to walk a different path. along the way. Sometimes we can do that directly with the person we have harmed, but sometimes we can't and we need to find some other way of paying back the debt we owe.

Zacchaeus did it in a very appropriate way. He had cheated people as a tax collector and so he gave away what really didn't belong to him. I doubt whether he could have traced all those

Reparation – making up for what we have done wrong – is the next step he had cheated. But, by doing what he did, he felt that he had taken an important step.

Jesus response to him was:

“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:9)

It is often much easier to make gestures like Zacchaeus and the young prisoner, than it is to face the person we have wronged and to try to make reparation, and we must never use the grand gesture as a way of avoiding the personal attempt at reparation - where that is possible.

Victim/offender mediation is one way in which the Criminal Justice system has attempted to facilitate this process and it can be very successful for both victim and offender. It can help each to listen to the other and understand one another. It can lead to forgiveness – and even if it doesn't, it will allow both parties to say what they want and may produce a measure of understanding. It must never, however, be used simply as a means of meeting targets or 'ticking boxes' to say that a certain number of offenders have taken part in a programme.

A different form of reparation is 'making the punishment fit the crime', such as young graffiti artists being asked to clean up their community.

Questions of group discussion

In what ways can those in prison make reparation for their crimes?

Would community punishment (unpaid work for the good of the community) better enable this process?

Questions for personal reflection

To whom, if anyone, do I need to make reparation?

How can I do that without compounding the hurt?

What's going on?

The Inside Out Trust:

- works in more than 70 prisons, to help volunteer prisoners carry out work that teaches them new skills, benefits others in the community, and should make them less likely to re-offend
- puts the principles of restorative justice into practice – giving prisoners the opportunity to make **reparation**, if not to individual victims of crime, to the community as a whole
- runs a wide range of projects, including transcription into Braille, producing high quality artwork for hospices, making wheelchairs, and refurbishing discarded goods
- enables prisoners to contribute to the large-scale creation or regeneration of parks, such as Albert Park in Middlesbrough, Saltwell Park, Gateshead, and Courage Park, Reading
- is not a Christian organisation, but many of its staff, and the volunteers who support prisoner project teams, are motivated by their faith.

"You could feel good that you were doing something for the community, not just sitting back and doing your time...people had faith in us...they believed we could be rehabilitated...they were giving something back to us."

..... Tommy, who worked at Courage Park

See the Prisons Week Prayer from Session 1.

5. Reconciliation

The whole emphasis of restorative justice is that the offender, having recognised his or her offence, repented and made reparation, is reconciled with his/her victim and community once more. This is as important for the community as it is for the individuals.

Once someone has recognised their offence, repented and made reparation the possibility of reconciliation is opened up. That requires a willingness on the part of both parties to talk about what has happened, to offer and receive forgiveness and to put the past behind them. Only then can the relationship be fully restored and the offender take his or her place in the community.

It is far easier for two individuals to be reconciled with one another than it is for an individual to be reconciled with a community or for two groups of people to be reconciled with one another.

Luke tells the story of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet:

“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – she is a sinner.’” (Luke 7:36-39)

There are always those within any community who, like Simon the Pharisee, can see the wrong in others and want to label them for all time. So far as Simon was concerned the woman was a sinner and that defined her. Jesus saw a woman who knew her need for forgiveness and demonstrated that in her actions. She didn't want to be an outcast in her community any longer, she wanted to be accepted and her anointing of Jesus' feet was her way of asking for this reconciliation.

Undoubtedly there will have been those who could only see her as a woman of ill-repute for the rest of her life, but there will also have been those who welcomed her back into her community because they recognised her penitence.

There are many offenders who know how difficult it is to be reconciled to the community despite their best efforts to amend their lives.

The case of Myra Hindley reminds us just how difficult it can be. The mature woman who died in prison was not the same person as the young woman who was convicted of the crimes she committed. She had changed during her time in prison. She had served her sentence and yet successive Home Secretaries refused to release her because they knew that to do so would cause a public outcry from those who could not believe that she had changed. Like the thief on the cross, her punishment may have been in accordance with the law of the land but was justice really served by her continued incarceration or was the community simply being allowed to exact every last drop of retribution?

Prisoners allowed out for work in the community often talk about the process they go through as they work. They talk about the suspicion with which people greet them in the beginning, and of how that suspicion gradually diminishes as they become known as individuals rather than as men who have committed various crimes. One of the most damaging effects of locking people away is that they cease to be human because we label them as 'murderer', 'rapist', 'burglar' and so on, believing that this defines them.

It is only when we remove the label and meet face to face as human beings that we see the possibility of reconciliation. As soon as we categorise people we place barriers between us and hinder the healing of relationships.

Putting labels on people also dehumanises them and 'justifies' behaviour that we would never consider towards people we know and respect. A good example of this was the well-publicised detention, without trial, of those suspected of terrorist activity. They ceased to be members of our community and became objects of fear-filled hatred. Each of those suspected terrorists was a human being created in the image of God and each had a story to tell. Frequently it is a story of the abuse of his/her people over extended

periods of time that has led to desperate acts of violence. That is not to excuse such acts of violence, but to try and understand what causes them.

Questions for group discussion

What factors hinder reconciliation between offenders and their communities?

What factors hinder reconciliation between individuals?

Questions for personal reflection

Are there individuals or groups with whom I need to be reconciled?

What is hindering reconciliation?

See the Prisons Week Prayer from Session 1.

What's going on?

Community Mediation Schemes:

- have been set up in many areas of the country
- exist to enable people to resolve conflicts and **become reconciled**, with the help of an independent person, before those conflicts result in behaviour that might lead to civil or criminal proceedings in a court of law
- provide mediators to help people in a variety of conflict situations – disputes between neighbours, between family members (especially parents and teenagers) and in the workplace, as well as between victims and offenders
- teach mediation skills to children and young people, so that they can resolve conflicts in schools, and also be much better prepared to deal with confrontations in the adult world
- enable people to defuse anger that might be expressed in physical assault or verbal abuse, by showing them that they are being heard and understood – something we all need to feel
- have attracted the involvement of many Christians, because mediation is about peacemaking, and removing the outward and inner signs of conflict – it often enables the participants to give and receive forgiveness.

Factfile

Prisoners' family ties

- 55% of male prisoners, and 35% of women, were living with a spouse or partner before imprisonment
- 66% of women prisoners have dependent children under 18, and at least 20% are single parents (compared to 9% of the general population)
- 150,000 children have a parent in prison
- Maintaining family relationships can help to prevent prisoners re-offend, and assist them to be reintegrated into the community on release
- At October 2004, 82 of 139 prisons in England and Wales were overcrowded - overcrowding means that prisoners are more likely to be moved, to be held a long way from home, and to lose contact with families
- Because there are only 19 female prisons, women prisoners are likely to be held further from home, making it particularly difficult for them to maintain contact with their family, including their dependent children
- The number of visits to prisoners has fallen recently, despite the increasing prison population
- 43% of sentenced prisoners and 48% of remand prisoners say they have lost contact with their families since entering prison.

6. Restoration

Probably the best known Biblical example of this whole process of restorative justice is the parable of the prodigal son, which is found in Luke 15:11-32.

The younger son may not have committed any major offence by our standards but he had, by his actions, fractured family relationships and insulted his father. He had squandered the money his father had worked hard to accumulate and he had made a fool of himself with his fair weather friends. His actions had brought shame on his family.

Luke tells us that he reached a point where he realised what he had done and was mortified. He repented and he wanted to make reparation. He was prepared to go and work for his father as one of his hired men in order to try and make up for his actions. He knew that he deserved nothing more. Fortunately for him his father was a forgiving man and he welcomed him back as a son, not as a hired hand. The relationship was restored and he was restored to his place within the family.

It wasn't all a happy ending though. The elder brother wasn't impressed with his father's forgiving nature. For that family to have been truly reconciled the elder brother needed to be reconciled with his younger brother as well. His father did his best to effect that reconciliation as his younger son was restored to his place within the family.

The notion of restorative justice is not some new trendy idea, thought up by woolly-minded liberals. It is the very heart and essence of the Gospel.

Paul sums it up in this way:

“So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us this message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:16-20)

Paul gets to the very heart of the Gospel. It is not about living by some code of law, it is about how men and women live in relationship with God and with one another.

In order for people to live in harmony in community there have to be agreed laws. If a member of the community breaks one of those laws then the response should not be to ostracise that person but for the community to do all it can to restore the broken relationship and allow that person to resume their place as a member of the community.

Of course there are people who represent a danger and who, for the safety of the community, and for their own safety, need to be removed from the community. However, they are in the minority and many of them should be in mental health facilities and not in prison. Even those who do need to be removed from the community should be accorded the respect that is due to all God's children and every effort should be made to restore them to their community. They were not created evil because they, like everyone else, were created in the image of God.

If you need reminding:

“God saw all that he had made and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31a)

Punishing law breakers without looking at the causes of their law breaking is about as effective as putting a sticking plaster on a broken leg. It will have no effect on the healing that is needed.

As Christians we believe that God sent Jesus to restore all people to himself. That is about living in relationship with God and it involves our relationships with other people. Unless they are healed, our relationship with God cannot be completely healed.

For that to happen we need to learn to live in community once more and to take responsibility for one another as well as for ourselves.

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement!” (James 2:12)

“My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19)

Questions for group discussion

Can you share some personal experience that illustrates restorative justice at work?

How do you respond to the quotation above from James 2:12

And finally, have these sessions caused you to re-think your approach to criminal behaviour?

What’s going on?

Community Chaplaincy:

- has worked successfully in Canada for more than 25 years, and is being introduced here, with the active support of the Churches’ Criminal Justice Forum, and HM Prison Service Chaplaincy
- aims to help those leaving prison to be **restored** to their communities and to lead crime-free lives, by providing a ministry of continuing practical and pastoral care
- involves trained volunteers, from churches and other faith communities, working under the direction of a community chaplain, in advising, befriending and mentoring people from before, until some months after, their release from prison
- will endeavour to support all those who ask for its help, including but not only, those who are on a faith journey
- is a network of local projects – currently there are around a dozen Community Chaplaincies.

“I was visited in my cell frequently in the final weeks of my sentence which helped me get a lot of things into perspective. Since my release...the Community Chaplain has been a fantastic support, as I have found it difficult to be accepted back into the community.”

..... M.A., formerly an inmate of HMP Swansea.

See the Prisons Week Prayer from Session 1.

Final reflection - How can I get involved?

Most areas have a Victim Support Scheme, with trained volunteers visiting those who have been victims of crime. Could you train as a volunteer? Some areas have Community Mediation Schemes where trained volunteers seek to resolve neighbourhood disputes before they reach the point where a crime is committed. Could you be a mediator, with the right training?

What about the local Crime Reduction Partnership? Do you know if there is one in your area? If you live in an area with a Community Chaplaincy Scheme, could you offer help and support to someone just out of prison? If there is no scheme in your area then maybe you could help to generate interest in your community.

If you are not able to be actively involved in the practical aspects of this type of work you can still pray for those who are involved and remind your own Church community about the work that goes on day by day and week by week. All those who work for justice value your prayers.

Some contact addresses are given on the final page. Details of many other opportunities for volunteering are contained in '**What Can I Do?**' a booklet produced by Churches' Criminal Justice Forum and the Prison Advice and Care Trust. A new edition is currently being produced, with the help of funding from the Home Office.

Suggestions for further reading on restorative justice and criminal justice reform are also contained in **What Can I Do?**

Contact Addresses

Alpha in Prisons

Holy Trinity Brompton, Brompton Road, London SW7 1JA. tel.020 7052 0336. e-mail: prisons@alpha.org.
www.alphacourse.org/prisons and www.caringforexoffenders.org

Churches' Criminal Justice Forum

39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX. tel. 020 7901 4878. info@ccjf.org.uk www.ccjf.org.uk

Community Chaplaincy

Major Lawrie Brown, Salvation Army Prison Ministries, 101 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6BN. tel. 020 7367 4866 e-mail
lawrie.brown@salvationarmy.org.uk

Community Mediation

Mediation UK, Alexander House, Telephone Avenue, Bristol BS1 4BS
tel. 0117 904 6661. e-mail: enquiry@mediationuk.org.uk

Inside out Trust

Hilton House, 55-57a High Street, Hurstpierpoint, West Sussex BN6 9TT. tel. 01273 833050. e-mail:
info@iotrust.plus.com

pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust)

Suite C5, City Cloisters, 196 Old Street, London EC1V 9FR. 020 7490 3139. info@pact.uk.net
www.imprisonment.org.uk

Prison Fellowship

PO Box 945, Maldon, Essex CM9 4EW. tel. 01621 843232.
e-mail: enquiries@prisonfellowship.org.uk www.prisonfellowship.org.uk

Restorative Justice Consortium

Merchant House, 89 Southwark Street, London SE1 OHX. Tel. 020 7960 4633. e-mail:
info@restorativejustice.org.uk www.restorativejustice.org.uk

Victim Support (National Office)

Cranmer House, 39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ. Tel. 020 7735 9166. e-mail:
contact@victimsupport.org.uk www.victimsupport.org.uk

The Churches' Criminal Justice Forum seeks to:

- Uphold Christian values in criminal justice
- Stress the relevance of criminal justice to Christian teaching and raise awareness of victim and offender concerns in local churches
- Be in dialogue with politicians, particularly to promote policies that address those aspects of social exclusion that are major factors in offending
- Promote Restorative Justice, which offers a voice to victims and communities and gives offenders the opportunity to make amends
- Encourage churchgoing people to get involved in practical ways and share news of local initiatives. A *'What Can I Do?'* booklet is available
- Develop Community Chaplaincy projects
- Support prison family visiting projects
- Develop dialogue on criminal justice with other faiths



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