

POINTS TO REMEMBER

ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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Points to Remember is a new feature of Full Circle that contains suggestions and advice about putting restorative justice to work from experienced practitioners. Engaging the community about restorative justice is one of RJ's strategic program goals. Much of our effort has focused on the tremendous potential of bringing together values-oriented members of the faith community

We asked Jean Greenwood to give us some points to remember as we work with members of the faith community.

Many of us assume that communities of faith will resonate quite naturally with the principles and applications of restorative justice. Concepts of reconciliation, peacemaking, healing, forgiveness, relationship and community building, so fundamental to restorative justice, also echo the values that undergird many faith communities. Similarly, for people of faith seeking to live out their faith in concrete ways, involvement in restorative justice would seem a perfect fit. It is, therefore, puzzling that more faith communities have not caught the excitement and stepped forward to embrace restorative justice work. Has the word not gotten out? Have we failed to communicate effectively with communities of faith? What can we do to reach this population, in order to benefit our work and the life of those communities as well?

1) Build a relationship. Invite the pastor, rabbi, or lay leaders to observe or, better yet, participate in an actual restorative process. Follow up with them and stay in touch. Continue to answer their questions and offer ongoing information about the work. Offer consultation as they explore ways of involving themselves in restorative justice. Show a sincere interest in their work as well. Be prepared to offer them graceful understanding, recognizing that faith communities are stretched. Demands for their attention and response are voluminous, while financial and human resources are typically limited. Support them in whatever level of involvement they are able to muster at any given time.

2) Connect with their vision and draw on their language. What is their mission? What values and concepts drive their work? What stories and sacred writings energize them? Engage in dialogue about the

linkages: how does restorative justice speak to these values, visions, and stories? How is "love" manifested through restorative processes? Is "reconciliation" a relevant theme for them? Listen, seeking to understand and respect their language, thoughts, and feelings. Utilize words and images meaningful to them.

3) Let them know how restorative justice involvement might benefit them. Explore the needs and concerns of faith communities, both corporate and personal. How does your work address those needs? Describe the transformative potential of the process, its impact on participants and facilitators/mediators, and the opportunities for learning and growth that might consequently emerge within the community of faith. Remember that you are offering them a gift. Restorative justice involvement may serve as a revitalizing force within a congregation.

4) Acquaint yourself with their organizational structure. What are the opportunities and challenges inherent in their structure, and what strategies might be useful? Seek their wisdom and probe their experience. Explore the varied points of access within that structure, e.g. women's circle/guild, men's group, mission or social justice committee, adult education, social groups, denominational boards or committees. Identify the leadership who may be interested in restorative justice: community outreach coordinator or pastor, deacons/pastoral care givers, educators, mission programming staff, denominational representatives, chaplains. Cultivate a connection with volunteer facilitators/mediators who belong to that faith community, to discover their knowledge of the structure and willingness to advocate for restorative justice work.

5) Provide small, practical ways for involvement, and engage them directly in the process. Explore with faith communities an array of possible tasks that contribute to restorative justice work. The tasks should be con-

crete and creative while simple and specific. Can they offer space in their facility for mediations, offices or training? Could they provide volunteers to assist with mailings, phoning, media initiatives, training, fundraising? Also invite their direct participation as community representatives in a conference or circle, as trained mediators/facilitators, mentors, job trainers/coaches, recreation leaders, or community service supervisors. Could the congregation generate community service or short-term employment opportunities?

6) Personalize - link your story to theirs. Why are you involved in restorative justice, and what meaning does it have for you? Allow your energy, enthusiasm, and motivation to show. How did you first learn about restorative justice? What were your first reactions? Describe your own growth in understanding. What vision, principles, and writings inspire you, and how do they resonate with their traditions? What stories of restorative justice in action move you and might inspire them? Use a case history to describe your program and process. What does it mean to you personally to seek to live in a restorative way? Remember that the personal is powerful. Engage them in considering the potential relevance of your experience to them.

7) Build ownership. Invite communities of faith to engage substantively in restorative justice work by serving on a design team, an advisory council, a board of directors. Seek their input as well as their commitment. Involve them in designing public relations strategies. Provide them with opportunities for public speaking and writing, for representing the program. Invite them to brainstorm program development.

8) Keep the work and the workers visible: educate and celebrate. Provide ongoing opportunities to learn about restorative justice, how it affects communities, victims, offenders, and the criminal justice system. Share with them cutting edge ideas being implemented in the field. Offer presentations, sermons, or classes on site. At the same time, honor and acknowledge the importance of their contributions to restorative justice work, and to your program. Give visibility to their efforts in letters or newsletters, news releases, in congregational or public ceremonies. Invite them to tell their stories - what has been meaningful for them?

9) Engage them in broader restorative opportunities. Brainstorm together ideas they might implement to enhance or expand restorative justice within their com-

munity. Are they interested, for example, in mentoring young offenders, facilitating community dialogue about values/crime, organizing support groups for victims or offenders, providing healing ceremonies for victims, offenders, and communities? Inform them of other restorative justice initiatives that might be of interest. Communities of faith may even wish to sponsor new programs. They may also be instrumental in eliciting the involvement of other congregations. Use a team from one congregation to engage or train another.

10) Invite communities of faith into a deeper understanding of restorative justice. How is restorative justice a way of life, applicable at home, in the workplace, etc.? Is it not a microcosm of our experience in human community, complete with the painful reality of mistakes and the potential for resolution, restoration, and healing? As such, it may serve as a vehicle for hope.

Remember that you have a gift to offer communities of faith. Engaging in restorative justice can only serve to renew their hopefulness and sense of calling and mission, and enhance their vision and vitality, as they discover ways to build peace within their community, within their lives.

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She is currently developing a restorative model for use in congregations, I AM THE ONE WHO WILL MAKE THE PEACE, soon to be piloted in the Twin Cities area.

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