

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Bringing Healing to Communities, Churches, and Schools



The Death Penalty and Restorative Justice (DP/RJ) Issue Team met at Meribah Retreat Center in New York on April 29-30. On Saturday afternoon, the 9 team members were joined by 15 additional people for a workshop on Restorative Justice (RJ) led by Joanne Blaney.*

The Gospel message and statements by our Catholic bishops encourage us to search for alternatives to the current punishment and revenge model used in our criminal justice system. Joanne gave an overview of the differences between retributive justice and RJ. The RJ process focuses on responsibility, repairing harm, restoring relationships, and social reintegration.

Joanne led us in an experience of a restorative "circle," which is an example of an RJ practice. In the circle each person had an opportunity to speak in response to specific questions, while all listened. For this exercise, we used questions designed for a peace-making circle; though our group did not have any conflict that needed healing, the experience illustrated some of the benefits of a circle. Aspects of a circle include: 1. creating a safe space; 2. using "I" statements; 3. focusing on feelings; 4. determining shared facts; 5. reaching consensus on an agreed-upon plan of action.

Our DP/RJ team grew in seeing how RJ can lead people away from violence, fear, and regret, and toward freedom and restoration of relationships. We look forward to learning more about RJ and promoting its practices within the Marianist Family and within our communities.

Those who wish to learn more about RJ might consider attending breakout session #10 ("Restorative Justice: An Approach That Views Healing and Community Building as Goals of Justice") at the MLC-NA Assembly in July in Dayton.

*Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking off every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)*

* Joanne Blaney is the Mission Service Director for Maryknoll Lay Missioners, and an internationally recognized authority on RJ. She worked with RJ practices for many years in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and has given trainings and presentations on RJ in Northern Ireland, the United States, Australia and Brazil.

