

BEYOND THE DEATH PENALTY TO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

By Grace Walle, FMI
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The Christmas message echoes, “Peace on earth, good will to all,” *but...* peace on earth does not begin and end with Christmas. The ministry of reconciliation continues as central to the followers of Jesus Christ. It will not succeed in establishing itself on the social and international planes unless it begins with us.

In addition to our death penalty abolition efforts, our issue team has been promoting restorative justice. We have been highly influenced by our collaboration with [Catholic Mobilizing Network](#) (CMN) which also focuses on both the death penalty and restorative justice. In order to educate ourselves on restorative justice, we attended conferences sponsored by CMN. Subsequently, we agreed that restorative justice was pertinent to our work because it focuses on the communal dimension of the human experience and offers an alternative framework for resolving conflict. It offers all key stakeholders an opportunity to repair the harm suffered as a result of the criminal offense and creates a social contract. The restorative process may occur through a victim impact panel, a sentencing circle, or community conferencing.

At our annual meeting in Dayton, OH in November, we piloted our new “[Community Meeting Kit](#)” published by the North American Center for Marianist Studies. Mary Beaudoin and Lauren Olson led the discussion. The participants responded positively to the materials and discussion that focused on both death penalty abolition and on restorative justice. Restorative justice practices are also successfully used with youth and adults, from minor acts to serious violence in schools, communities, and workplaces. It is our hope that lay communities in the Marianist Family will use this Meeting Kit to pursue this issue in light of Catholic Social Teaching and our Marianist charism.



Team members – Bob Stoughton, John Holden, Sr. Grace Walle, Lauren Olson, and Mary Beaudoin
- showing off their new Community Meeting Kit.

At our annual meeting, we also had the opportunity to interact with Professor Martha Hurley, a University of Dayton professor in Criminal Justice. She is initiating a restorative justice course in the UD Criminal Justice program. Her hope is that students would have both coursework in the

classroom and service learning in this field. Additionally she is excited about an opportunity to build resources for referrals for the community.

As we near Christmas, we remember that God's justice is concerned with restoring relationships and community wholeness. Our issue team hopes our humble efforts will contribute to our Marianist Family efforts to work for peace on earth and good will to all.