

A Year in the Life of a DP-RJ Issue Team Member

Justice Jottings January 2023 – Reflection by Mary Beaudoin

Members of the MSJC Death Penalty Abolition and Restorative Justice (DP-RJ) issue team are involved in a wide variety of projects. As a team, we partner with several organizations, including Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN), Death Penalty Action (DPA), and others. Individual team members also collaborate with abolition groups in their state and with groups involved in restorative justice at the local or national level. Through these collaborations, we bring Marianist values to a broader community.

CMN is “a national organization that mobilizes Catholics and all people of goodwill to value life over death, to end the use of the death penalty, to transform the U.S. criminal justice system from punitive to restorative, and to build capacity in U.S. society to engage in restorative practices.” An example of a resource created by CMN is *Paths of Renewed Encounter: A Restorative Justice Engagement Guide for Catholic Communities*. As noted in the guide’s introduction, “CMN created *Paths of Renewed Encounter* to further prepare people for Gospel-centered responses to harm that enable personal, communal, and systemic transformation.”

DPA “provides high visibility resources, leadership, support, educational and direct action events and activities within the broader anti-death penalty movement. DPA is prepared to assist various local, state, and national groups in their work to end the use of the death penalty.”

Each DP-RJ team member writes a reflection article for *Justice Jottings* once a year. These articles often reflect on an activity in which the member or team is engaged. Some team members participate in CMN’s Mercy In Action Project, which gives “the tools you need to promote clemency for those on death row.” (DPA provides a similar service of alerts and action items.) Anyone can sign up to receive monthly execution alerts and detailed information to easily send a letter or email to a state official. Frequently the alerts include a phone number and script to call for urgent action.

Below is a list of some of the projects and activities in which our DP-RJ team -- as a group and as individuals -- has been involved during the past year. **Consider how you might become involved in a future project to end the death penalty and promote restorative justice.** Our team is looking for new members so reach out at info@marianistsjc.net if you’re interested in learning more!

January

- Our team members planned activities for our in-person meeting, to include connecting with local Marianists through a sharing circle.
- A team member introduced us to CMN’s “Encounters With Dignity” podcasts on Restorative Justice. <https://encounters-with-dignity.captivate.fm/>

February

- Our annual DP-RJ team in-person meeting was held in Dayton. These meetings always include outreach events that are open to anyone. Events have included a speaker, a panel discussion, a training workshop, a movie viewing followed by reflection, and social

time. Last year our meeting included a visit with the Abe Bonowitz, the Executive Director of Death Penalty Action (DPA), as well as a sharing circle on Marianist values and social justice.

March

- Following up on our February visit, we partnered with DPA to call state officials (e.g., the governor, parole board, district attorney, etc.) to urge action to stop scheduled executions.
- A team member wrote the annual Good Friday reflection on Mary at her son Jesus' execution.
- Another team member helped lead a Circle Intensive sponsored by CMN.

April

- We celebrated the Stay of Execution for Melissa Lucio in Texas, while the court considers new evidence of her innocence in the death of her daughter.
- A team member began writing to a pen pal who is incarcerated.

May

- A team member participated in CMN's online prayer vigil, which is held the First Friday of every month. The vigil is typically 45-60 minutes in length. Participants remember and pray for murder victims, people on death row, and for the end of the death penalty. The vigil includes Scripture, a witness talk or homily, music, and intercessory prayer.
- The DP-RJ team held its quarterly meeting online.

June

- Starvin' for Justice, the annual fast & vigil to end the death penalty, is held in front of Supreme Court in Washington DC each year from June 29 through July 2. DP-RJ team members attended the evening talks given by death row exonerees, murder victim family members, and abolition activists. Since 2020, this event has included an online component. Anyone can attend in person (road trip to DC!) or register to join online from anywhere.

July

- A team member attended a national Restorative Justice Conference in Chicago and wrote a reflection on "Violence, Trauma, Healing, and the RJ Way."
- We shared CMN's *Justice and Mercy Poetry Contest* winning poems on social media.

August

- A team member was workshop coordinator for *Modern Day Lynching: Catholics Call for Abolition of the Death Penalty* at Pax Christi USA's National Conference.
- The DP-RJ team held its quarterly meeting online.

September

- A team member learned all about CMN's new Restorative Justice Communities of Practice; these are virtual events that build skills, relationships, and capacity for restorative ministry.
- Team members trained as circle keepers continued to hone their skills by leading online and in-person circles.

October

- A team member participated in a prayer vigil for Rodney Reed (innocent but still on death row) as his case was presented to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- A team member attended CMN's *Justice Reimagined Awards & Celebration* event on October 10, the annual World Day Against the Death Penalty. Awards were given honoring Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Archbishop of Washington, and Vicki & Syl Schieber, who opposed the death penalty for their daughter's 1998 killer, and successfully advocated for the abolition of capital punishment in their home state of Maryland and beyond.
- Through our partnership with Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (FADP), we shared a Washington Post article on a Parkland massacre victim's family member standing against the idea that retribution will bring 'justice' and 'healing' to him and his family: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/27/parkland-school-shooting-trial-death-penalty/>

November

- The DP-RJ team quarterly meeting in November featured St. Mary's University law student, Cody Huffman, sharing the story of his own mother's wrongful conviction and incarceration, as well as his involvement in stopping Melissa Lucio's execution.

December

- Team members are always on the lookout for inspiring stories. One of those was learning about Hour Children, a program to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children successfully rejoin the community, reunify with their families, and build healthy, independent, and secure lives. Hour Children's name acknowledges the key hours that impact the life of a child with an incarcerated mother – the hour of her arrest, the hour of their visit, and the hour of their reunification.
- DPA held a webinar featuring sharing by family members of incarcerated, wrongly convicted people; the program was called "Not Another Christmas in Prison." https://static.showit.co/file/GRPZWn-qRYWXpNbJV3tvHw/99684/msjc_prayer_peace_thomas-2.pdf

Our team is active on many fronts and would welcome new volunteers to assist with any of these efforts. **Join us in sharing the Marianist spirit with those who seek justice and mercy.**