

As We Forgive Those Who Trespass against Us

By Mary Beaudoin

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Lent begins in a few weeks with Ash Wednesday on February 17 this year. Lent is a time of repentance when we recognize and seek forgiveness for our sins. But this “requires” that we forgive others. Each time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we ask God to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” What does forgiveness look like and how do we arrive there? What difference does forgiveness make for those who have harmed others? What difference does forgiveness make for those who have been harmed?

Recently I have been looking at harm and forgiveness through a new lens, that of restorative justice. I recall many times in my life when I have been harmed and the variety of ways in which I have responded to those harms - striking back, silent suffering, passive aggressiveness, harming others, “offering it up.” I also recall times in my life when I have caused harm and then experienced remorse. What followed would often be a helpless, awkward feeling of not knowing how to make up for what I had said or not said, done or not done. I wanted to take responsibility for what I had done and somehow work to repair the relationship.

Then I consider the **serious** harms that people suffer, including when a loved one is killed. I ponder the ways that victims of such harms process their feelings of anger, rage, and depression. There are certainly many unanswered questions and a desire to find peace. I also consider the perspective of those who cause serious harm and the feelings that they experience once they begin to face the magnitude of the harm they caused. How do they process their feelings of remorse and perhaps self-hatred? How can they begin to take responsibility for their actions and work to restore relationships?

The Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) describes Restorative Justice in this way:

- Restorative justice is a way of understanding crime and harm in terms of the people and relationships impacted, rather than the law or rule that was broken.
- Restorative practices seek to repair harm through transformative encounters that model Jesus’ reconciling way.
- A lived expression of Catholic Social Teaching principles, restorative justice offers a framework for transforming relationships and systems that values human dignity, accountability, and racial equity.

Restorative philosophy and practices resonate with Marianist principles of community and inclusivity. Marianists strive to welcome all to the table and to live as a community of equals. Yet our relationships in community are frequently in need of healing. Being a whole community requires that we face the harm we cause as well as the harm we suffer and that we practice forgiveness so that we can move forward together. The Marianist system of virtues calls us to listen, to communicate with kindness, both in words and actions, and to restore relationships that

have been wounded or broken. As Marianists we strive to bring Christ's peace to the world and to work for the coming of his kingdom.

Moving from harm toward healing and forgiveness is often a long process. I believe that restorative justice practices are key to the forgiveness that we as individuals and as a community aspire to each time we pray the Lord's Prayer.

In an effort to promote knowledge of restorative justice principles and use of restorative practices within MSJC, Marianist communities and Marianist ministries, the Death Penalty Abolition and Restorative Justice team will host an online panel discussion on Thursday, March 4, at 7:30-9:00 p.m. EST. Panelists will share their stories of the transformative power of restorative justice in criminal justice and in educational settings. Our hope is that the Marianist Family will embrace restorative practices as a way to facilitate better sharing, listening, peacemaking and conflict resolution in Marianist communities and institutions.

This panel discussion is open to all members of the Family of Mary, students, faculty and staff at Marianist schools, and anyone interested in learning more about restorative justice. Join us for a deeper dive into Lenten spirituality and the journey toward living in a new and restorative way.

As We Forgive Those Who Trespass against Us: Lent, Forgiveness, and Restorative Justice

Thursday, March 4, 7:30-9:00 p.m. EST.

Panelists:

- Sr. Donna Liette CPPS works with mothers who have lost children to violence or incarceration.
- Leonard Rubio is Executive Director of Insight Prison Project. While incarcerated at San Quentin, Leonard created the Responsibility, Rehabilitation, & Restoration Interfaith Roundtable. It promotes restorative justice by including prisoners and volunteers from many faith and ethnic backgrounds to work together.
- TBA – a specialist in Restorative Justice in educational settings.

Watch for registration link in your email and in the February edition of *Justice Jottings*.

Further Reading

The Little Book of Restorative Justice: Revised and Updated, by Howard Zehr, 2015, Skyhorse Publishing

Harm, Healing, and Human Dignity: A Catholic Encounter with Restorative Justice, adapted by Caitlin Morneau, © 2019, Catholic Mobilizing Network; published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, USCCB