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FAMILY TIES

Restorative Justice

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Restorative justice is a very old concept. The Old Testament “cities of refuge” provided for it, and Jesus modeled it. Perhaps it was His redefinition of criminal justice in that culture that provided the final straw for Jesus’ enemies. Once and for all, His radical voice must be quieted.

For the last 20 years or so, there has been a growing movement to understand and respond to crime and victimization through a lens identified as “Restorative Justice.” It’s being used with juveniles, youthful offenders and adult criminals throughout the world. It’s being used in courts, probation, police departments, court diversion programs, public schools, agencies, organizations and community groups.

If you aren’t personally involved in this process at one of the above levels, it might be helpful to understand the four key values of restorative justice initiatives:

Encounter: Creating opportunities for victims, offenders and community members who want to do so to meet and discuss the crime and its aftermath.

Amends: Expecting offenders to take steps to repair the harm they have caused.

Reintegration: Seeking to restore victims and offenders to whole, contributing members of the society.

Inclusion: Providing opportunities for parties with a stake in a specific crime to participate in its resolution.

This is a powerful movement. It moves towards restoration rather than shame, blame and punishment. It builds hope. Restorative justice is a very real need in our society, and I invite you to consider what this concept means for you personally, for your family, and what your responsibilities are as a member of your own community.

The beauty of restorative justice is that it is God’s way, and we don’t need to wait for legal or community organizations to organize these

initiatives in our own homes. The messiness of daily living provides many opportunities for restorative justice. It is the responsibility of the adult caregivers to offer opportunities for safe dialogue about what has happened between family members, to teach them how to offer and make amends, and to restore members back into the family.

It almost goes without saying that if the home were the place where restorative justice and redemptive discipline was practiced, we would not have many of the social ills of today. However, we do live in this messy world. There are powerful forces for evil, and powerful forces for good.

You can be a force for good. I invite you to consider these questions: Are there things you can change in your own personal world that will bring more dignity and value to those with whom you reside? Do you believe that relationships are more important than power? How do you show that? What is your role in fostering restorative justice in your home, with your work associates, in your church, and in the broader community?

To learn more about the restorative justice movement visit www.restorativejustice.org. I encourage you to consider Kay Pranis’ work on restorative values and confronting family violence available on that website. A suggested resource for parents is Jean Illsley Clarke’s book, *Time-In: When Time-Out Doesn’t Work*.

Restorative justice does begin at home!

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

