

BE A “RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CONGREGATION!”

WHAT’S THAT?

WHY WOULD WE WANT TO?

HOW DO WE DO THAT?

What’s That?

In the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC we have “*Green Congregations*” who care about the healing and nurturing of our earth.

And we have “*Restorative Justice Congregations*” who care about the healing and nurturing of people and communities whose relationships are broken. Both speak to the guidance of many of our Old and New Testament Scriptures. Both embrace the pleas of the prophet Micah when he draws us towards more moral and responsible lifestyle choices: we are to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God [Micah 6:8]. The basis of *Restorative Justice* is that crime is a harm that needs to be addressed by the victim, the community and the offender. Especially when the crime is non-violent, RJ is an approach to justice that focuses on the needs of the victims and the offenders, as well as the involved community, instead of satisfying abstract legal principles or simply isolating and punishing the offender. Restorative Justice can bring healing to the victim and the offenders and their communities. In contrast, our existing government criminal justice system is a one of retribution and punishment that separates and damages communities and isolates both the offenders and the victims.

Why would we want to?

Restorative Justice is a new movement based on ancient principles of villages and tribes – traditional cultures that treasure the intrinsic value of family and community. RJ can bring together the faith community and the law enforcement community with a process inspired by biblical precepts, and the strong spiritual and community based mores of indigenous communities. A Restorative Justice Circle creates a framework for a system of justice that can bring healing and wholeness instead of isolation, brokenness and retribution. It can recognize that the harm of an offense is *primarily* an injury to human relationships – families, congregations, towns - and in this it is also an injury to our Covenant with each other and our God. *Secondarily*, that harm is a violation of secular law.

A Few Comparisons: In the State’s *retributive justice* system victims are in many ways ignored. Their questions aren’t answered – why me? why this? why did you do it? Their losses are not recouped. Their needs are secondary.



In a *retributive justice* system ... blame fixing is central (guilty or not guilty?). With *restorative justice*...problem-solving is central (how do we fix this?).

In a *retributive justice* system ... the focus is on the past (what happened? who did what to whom?). With *restorative justice*...the focus is on the future (how do we help the injured recover their lives? how do we make sure this doesn't happen again?).

And as an added incentive to promoting Restorative Justice as a way of addressing the people involved in a crime, statistics show that it actually works more of the time than traditional Criminal Justice / Retributive Justice. "Restorative justice that fosters dialogue between victim and offender shows the highest rates of victim satisfaction and offender accountability.

[\(Lawrence W Sherman and Heather Strang \(2007\). "Restorative Justice: The Evidence" \(PDF\). University of Pennsylvania.\)](#)

So How Do We Become a "Restorative Justice Congregation?"

Visit macucc.org/becomingarestorativejusticecongregation

- Review carefully, with prayerful discussion, the [Resolution on Restorative Justice](#) that was passed by the delegates of the 200th Annual Meeting on April 25, 1999 in Worcester, Massachusetts.
- Examine the Restorative Justice resources of the [Massachusetts Conference UCC](#) and on the World Wide Web.
- Focus a worship service and sermon on restorative justice and healing. (Read two samples: [Fred Anderson's original](#); [Mike Rich's revised version](#))
- Pray for God's restorative justice in your church and community.
- Conduct a Restorative Justice Bible Study in your church.
- Invite representatives of the [MACUCC Restorative Justice Task Team](#) and the [Massachusetts Restorative Justice Coalition](#) to speak in your church.
- Pray to become a part of Micah's magnificent vision! (Micah 6:8)

Restorative Justice involves
three parties:



the
victim
or the individual
harmed



the
offender
or the individual who
caused the harm



the
community
the place where the
harm was committed