

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

It is a theory of justice that emphasizes the repairing of harm caused by unjust behavior. It offers an alternative to Retributive Justice (eye for an eye) by holding offenders accountable, while simultaneously trying to redeem their broken situation. It is an acknowledgment that true justice is difficult work, but that the value and dignity of all persons involved is worth the effort.

It is also the official teaching of the church that punishment for a crime, "in addition to defending public order and protecting people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: As far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2266)

BISHOPS STATEMENTS

Let Justice and Mercy Meet: Crime, Punishment and the Common Good in Light of Sacred Scripture and Catholic Teaching

By the Bishops of Louisiana (2002)

Justice involves right order. Restorative justice involves the return to right order, effected through the acceptance of responsibility, the assignment of appropriate punishment and the return or restoration of as many as possible to the human community. The appropriate punishment redresses the harm done to the victims, their families and the wider society and both rehabilitates offenders and restores them to their families. Restorative justice also calls on us to reject capital punishment as an effective and moral means of confronting crime. Death does not restore, heal, or make whole what was lost. Death only causes more death. When the state imposes death as a sentence, a further insensitivity to the loss of life is the result. The death penalty makes it easy to give up on others and neglect the underlying causes which yield violence and death. As a people of the Gospel of Life, we are called to build a civilization of life and love.

A Statement of the Administrative Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops April 2, 1999

Respect for all human life and opposition to the violence in our society are at the root of our long-standing position against the death penalty. We see the death penalty as perpetuating a cycle of violence and promoting a sense of vengeance in our culture. As we said in *Confronting a Culture of Violence*: "We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing."⁶

We oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.