

# The Restorative Church and the Criminal Justice System

## RJM TEAM LEADERS

Although the restorative church may not have the resources or membership to deal with every area of Restorative Justice, she can begin to develop a vision for some of the need. The area or areas chosen should be prayerfully considered and determined by the church's vision and mission statements, and available personnel and resources.



Restorative Justice Ministry Team Leaders should be chosen and charged with the God-given task of lay leadership in whatever area(s) of Restorative Justice the church decides to pursue. They should be made to understand that their role is just as viable and vital to the church as the Sunday School Teacher, Youth Worker, or other ministry leaders in the church.

The Team Leaders should be those who manifest a passion or calling to reach out to those in need, and have been so gifted by the Lord. Depending on the area(s) chosen, they should be people gifted in intercession, mercy, hospitality, helps, and discernment. People who meet the biblical standards of leadership so as to bring honor to the church.

Team Leaders, like the churches they serve in, need to be people who see the church (and themselves) as agents of restoration and “shalom” (God’s peace) to a needy world. They cannot be people who see the criminal justice system’s role as retributive, but see the biblical view of restoration and regeneration as the answer to crime.



# Restorative Justice within the Local Church



Since the church is to be the agent of restoration to a lost and dying world, it is only fitting that the local church begins to see her mandate to deal with the criminal justice system as Jesus charged them to in Matthew 25.

Being agents of restoration, the church needs to see her role in bringing “shalom” (God’s peace) to those trapped in the cycle of crime, either as perpetrator, victim, or criminal justice professional.

The restorative church thus needs to incorporate Restorative Justice into her Home Missions budget and her efforts as an area within the church’s “Jerusalem” (Acts 1:8). So often, in our rush to get to the “uttermost parts of the earth” we forget that our first priority is to deal with the needs in our own backyard.

The restorative church should promote Restorative Justice by working with those incarcerated in the system, the victims of crime, those working in criminal justice, and the families of each of those parties.

To effectively meet this need, the restorative church should find those within their membership willing to bring restoration and regeneration to those souls that Jesus died for, and begin to develop and train those willing workers to effectively work within the church as Restorative Justice Team Leaders.



# Areas of Ministry for the Restorative Church

Based on the restorative church's vision and mission (how she sees herself fitting into the "Divine Plan" in the community and her response to the Great Commission), and based on her size and budget, there are a number of areas where the restorative church can minister effectively.

## 1. VICTIM MINISTRY

The most important impact the church can have on victims of crime is that of presence. As Job and his "comforters" learned, there are times when answers and reasons are not appropriate. Often, the most important way we can minister to someone is to simply walk with them through their dark period. Showing kindness, caring, and loving and thus providing healing, preventing the establishment of a root of bitterness that can bring harm to all those the victim touches. This can be interwoven with very practical help – repairing broken windows and locks, etc. – thus turning a tragic event around and bringing God glory.



## 2. OFFENDER MINISTRY

Although it may be impractical for each local church to develop an in-prison ministry team, there are ways that each church can help. The one-on-one relationship of a Christian mentor is vitally needed in the prisons. The church member would be matched with an inmate of the same sex, and would commit to befriend the inmate with regular letters and visits. When the inmate is released, the mentor would introduce the ex-inmate into the local church and would assist the ex-inmate's reintegration into society by continuing to model the Christian life, and helping the ex-inmate in their job search, housing search, and helping meet other needs – practical, spiritual, and emotional.

## 3. FAMILY MINISTRY



This area is actually another part of ministry to victims of crime. So often the church forgets that the inmate frequently leaves behind a spouse and children who are "doing time" with the offender, but innocent of any crime. Every sanction levied against the offender is also levied against his/her family.

Some churches provide "Marriage Seminars" to try to break the generational cycle of crime and brokenness. They may also provide support groups for spouses and children, and offer practical help as well. Often, the incarcerated member of the family was the one that handled the financial affairs of the family, dealt with utility companies and other agencies, made simple home repairs, and kept the

home and car running. Now they are gone, and the spouse often is unable to do even simple things like change a tire or check fluid levels in the car. Consider also that the incarcerated family member may have owned the family car in their own name, and the spouse may even be unable to renew license plates or buy insurance. The restorative church can provide the resources and support needed in situations like this, as well as aid in the mentoring of the children affected by the parent's criminal act.

The restorative church may also consider aiding in transportation of families to see their incarcerated loved ones. Some states seem to locate prisoners hundreds of miles from their homes and families, "punishing" the inmate even more, failing to take into consideration that they are also adding a great burden on the inmate's family. A restorative church could provide transportation (or buy a bus ticket) or even, if located near a prison, provide shelter for the visitors to allow them to see their loved ones and help keep families together.

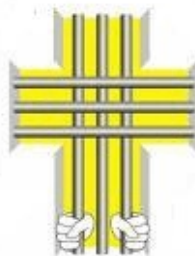
#### **4. CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS**

This is often the most difficult (and most critical) area of ministry. Instead of walking in peace as man was created to do, these correctional officers, officials, policemen, sheriffs, etc., spend much (if not most) of their time in stress and adversarial settings. There certainly is a tremendous opportunity for the restorative church to offer "shalom" (God's peace) to this vast and needy group.

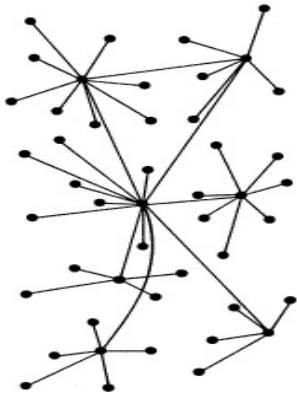


Divorce is rampant in this group due to the environmental stresses associated with the job. Constantly dealing with the upside-down nightmare world of crime and corruption warps the criminal justice professional's outlook on life, bringing great stress on the marriage relationship. The church can effectively provide for these professionals through "Marriage Seminars" and other support group activities.

The church can help these professionals see that there IS an answer to the seemingly revolving door of crime, and that the cycle of crime CAN be broken. They can be shown a vision of holy beauty to contrast the vision of the depths of sin that they must wallow in each day, thus restoring their minds so they can minister the Gospel where they work.



# ADVENT RECOVERY MINISTRIES - HELPING THE RESTORATIVE CHURCH



Restorative Justice can never be completed by one man or one ministry. It takes a network of people and churches to form community awareness.

Advent Recovery Ministries is dedicated to helping people and churches learn how they can become involved in making a difference. It is our desire that the Lord Jesus Christ will move upon your hearts and motivate you to involvement.

The Bible tells us that “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). We are here to help restore the vision and to encourage you to become involved in our criminal justice system.

With the cost of incarcerating a man or woman on the increase, we are well aware that our systems of courts, jails, and prisons are a very expensive failure, to say the least. The average cost to build a prison in Florida is about \$100-million, and the annual cost to run one is about \$40-million. It costs the taxpayers \$47.39 a day (\$17,297 a year) to care for and supervise an inmate in a major Florida prison. The Florida prison budget is \$2.2-billion a year.



The time of “Lock them up and throw away the key” mentality is past and it is time for the church to look at her rightful place at the forefront of Restorative Justice. We cannot afford the insanity of retributive justice any longer.

God’s Word teaches us that we are to visit those in prison and help those who are widows and orphans that have been left behind. We are to remember those in prison as if we were in prison with them – to treat them as if it were Jesus Himself locked in the cell.

The call has gone out. How will you respond to the call?



# Ways the Local Church Can be Involved

- ❑ Provide hope to the hopeless by directly ministering to those in prison or jail by joining a ministry team as a volunteer.
- ❑ Provide hope and spiritual instruction to an inmate by discipling them through correspondence.
- ❑ Provide of your substance by financially supporting the ministry of Advent Recovery Ministries, Inc.
- ❑ Capture the vision of jail/prison ministry as a home missions field.
- ❑ Provide on-going love and support by mentoring an inmate and helping them upon their release from prison by providing assistance with housing, a job, a church home, etc.
- ❑ Demonstrate the unconditional love and forgiveness we ourselves have received from Jesus Christ.



# Benefits to the Local Church that Gets Involved with Restorative Justice

- ✓ Unifies and strengthens the churches as they work together.
- ✓ Gives church members the opportunity to serve and minister in a home missions outreach without having to invest years of study in a Bible College.
- ✓ Empowers believers to become bold for Christ in their homes and communities.
- ✓ Enables believers to obey the mandate of Jesus Christ in Matthew 25.
- ✓ Provides an opportunity to receive training in ministry and/or put the training they have already received into practice.
- ✓ Allows believers to grow spiritually as they venture out of their comfort zone!

