

# The Way of Peace

ISSUE 7

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

This is the seventh in a series of eight pamphlets offered by the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice focusing on peace and active non-violence.

What could be achieved if we all realise that another future is possible? The state of the world and its communities is at stake. If there is to be a change it must begin with a conversion of each human heart.

There is a crying need and a global yearning today for reconciliation, the healing of broken relationships, the restoration to the oppressed of what was taken from them, respect for the place of everyone and everything. This is God's work, enfleshed in the life and words of Jesus. God reconciles the whole of creation in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Jesus took the side of the outcast, the marginalised, the poor. He unmasked their oppressors, but recognised the humanity of both. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the victim, a Jew, finds himself being cared for by the very person who is supposed to hate him and whom he is expected to fear!

**Reconciliation is a public process of truth-telling and healing.**

It brings together not only victims, perpetrators and their families, but also representatives of the local community. Victims tell what was done to them, what they have suffered, and their outrage and loss. Those who oppressed them have the opportunity to take responsibility, show remorse, and say what led them to this offence. Gradually, as people have their say, they move to a new place in their relationship as a community.

As they heal the wounds of division, they seek practical ways of restoring what was broken and compensating loss.

**This is what is called "Restorative Justice."**

We are called as Christians to create communities of hope, nurturing an alternate vision for our world, one based not on the need to blame and punish, but on the free gift of God's reconciling love. God empowers former victims and offenders to be healers and reconcilers in a broken world.

## Prayer for Reconciliation

In the midst of conflict and division, we know it is you who turns our minds and thoughts to peace.

Your Spirit changes our hearts: enemies begin to speak to one another, those who were estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together.

Let your Spirit be at work in us.

Give us understanding and put an end to strife, fill us with mercy and overcome our denial, grant us wisdom and teach us to learn from the people of the land.

(Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, adapted from the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation 11)

**'Only to the degree that an ethics and a culture of forgiveness prevail can we hope for a "politics" of forgiveness, expressed in society's attitudes and laws, so that through them justice takes on a more human character.'**

Pope John Paul II, World Peace Day Message, 2002 #8

***'If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother or sister has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.'* Matt 5:23-24**

**"Reading the Resurrection appearance stories as stories of reconciliation can give us a host of hints about the nature of reconciliation as a spirituality, as a ministry and as a strategy..."**

Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, Orbis Books, 1998.

*"Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil."*

(Pope John Paul II, *World Peace Day Message*, 2002, #8)



# FACT FILE

## Retributive Justice asks:

*"Who did this? How much pain did they cause?"*

*The answer is to cause at least as much pain as was initiated. There is little or no healing in this system as its main purpose is to punish.*

## Restorative Justice asks:

*"What will it take to restore "Shalom" (peace) back to this community now that it has been broken?"*

*What is needed to restore a wholeness to this victim?"*

*What will it take to eventually restore this offender to the community? These questions lead to "healing."*

✚ The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to help deal with the violence and human rights abuses that happened from all sides under apartheid.

✚ The current Truth and Reconciliation Commission in East Timor is a powerful symbol of transformation – it is housed in a former Indonesian prison, built in Portugese times, and funded for renovation by the Japanese.

✚ The use of Restorative Justice with criminals began in New Zealand in 1989, was adapted by Australian police in 1991, and is used in many Australian states.

✚ Restorative Justice is now used in many Australian schools and as a model for resolving family conflict.

✚ Education programs for social responsibility using conflict resolution, violence prevention, and inter-group relations skills are available for schools ( <http://esrnational.org/home.htm> )

## What can you do?

✚ Even when social policies or structures are the cause of exclusion or suffering, the victims have names, faces and stories. Apply the model of Restorative Justice in your family, school, parish.

✚ Form a learning circle; identify groups who are alienated from your community; learn about them; explore ways of restoring them to the community, eg., indigenous Australians, migrants, Catholics alienated from the Church, refugees, youth, the elderly.

✚ Read the National Catholic Education Commission Statement "Educating for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation". How can your school or community initiate some of these actions? [www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/reconciliation](http://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/reconciliation)

✚ Rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation

## PROFILE OF A PEACE MAKER

Mrs Elsie Heiss, a Wiradjuri woman, is the Co-ordinator of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in the Archdiocese of Sydney. She has worked selflessly over many years to nurture Reconciliation, especially to encourage the recognition and use of Aboriginal culture in the Australian Catholic Church. She contributed in a large way to the establishment of the Church of Reconciliation in La Perouse, the first of its kind where Aboriginal people prepare the liturgy in consultation with the priest. She was recently recognised with a Community Award from the La Perouse Aboriginal Community and Randwick City Council for her commitment to Reconciliation and Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. In 1998 she represented Aboriginal people at the Synod of Oceania where she spoke in the presence of Pope John Paul 11 and the Bishops of the Synod.

## USEFUL WEBSITES:

[www.rjmn.net](http://www.rjmn.net)

Restorative Justice Ministry Network of North America

[www.aic.gov.au/rjustice](http://www.aic.gov.au/rjustice)

Restorative Justice in Australia

[www.peacebrigades.org](http://www.peacebrigades.org)

Peace Brigades International (PBI)

[www.datec.net.pg/~phowley](http://www.datec.net.pg/~phowley)

Restorative Justice – Papua New Guinea Style

[www.maristyc.com.au](http://www.maristyc.com.au)

Marist Youth Care – Family Conferencing

[www.realjustice.org](http://www.realjustice.org)

Real Justice



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