



Hope and restorative justice

One of the criminal justice initiatives that has been around now for several years is something called Restorative Justice – not just in prisons; you can find a reference to how it is working out in one of our schools later in the magazine. As that suggests, it can work on a number of different levels and in a variety of contexts, and in each case, there are two thoughts at the heart of restorative justice: first, that wrongs can often be righted, and second, that this is more likely to happen when the perpetrator of a wrong or injustice is enabled to make contact with the person who has been wronged and express some degree of sorrow and regret.

There is a great deal of evidence to show that in all the contexts in which restorative justice has been applied, it is an effective tool, enabling both offender and victim to feel something different in relation to the original 'crime' or offence.

What might it mean for us? The restoration of justice is a major theme in the Old Testament. Seeking to establish justice

for all is embedded in its Law and understanding of society. God's idea of justice, though, is not impartial. It seeks to redress wrongs; it's biased towards those who can't put things right for themselves; it's an idea of justice that mirrors the way of life God desires us all to follow. Jesus called it the Kingdom of God and said it was open to us all – in reality God's partiality is a partiality for each one of us.

Restorative justice works with individuals, not societies, in the first instance – though actually a change in society can be brought about by individuals and what they do – it just needs a lot of us! Any of us therefore can seek to make it work. It works when an individual who knows that something they have done or said has caused hurt or damage consciously seeks to restore something of what was lost. This begins with seeking to understand what the damage was; this can only be discerned through engagement with the victim.

The relationship between our individual churches and the local prison (where they

are in reasonable proximity) will be the focus of an initiative called Hope 17 next year. Hope Together is an ecumenical initiative that has encouraged a variety of 'hope-inspiring' community events over recent years; Hope 17 is focusing on prison ministry and getting churches engaged in their work. The hope is that we can bring the two a little closer together. I have been hugely struck by the ministry that is undertaken in our prisons and mostly we know very little about it. Hope 17 will seek to put this right.

Perhaps our 'pause moments' over these two months could reflect on how we could be part of Hope 17; and on those whom we have wronged in some way, to restore just a little more justice to their lives.



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