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## A New Vision

By Emmett Solomon



Our challenge is to look at our system in a new way. As we think out loud, we begin to say, “We want to seek to change the reliance of our state and federal governments on incarceration as a means of addressing interpersonal conflict and other social problems.” Rather than retribution and punishment, we seek to create a system committed to restorative and healing justice. Such a system would look beyond individual crimes to the entire community and society. It would address the really “big” issues as well as individual crimes that arise out of these inequities, with the understanding that criminal activity is often symptomatic of much deeper social issues.

A fundamentally different system would include an emphasis on the harm done by crime to the community as well as to the individual victim. All members of the community would become involved in resolving many, if not most, of the conflicts currently adjudicated by the juvenile and criminal justice systems’ proxy “professionals.” Thus, the primary stakeholders in a conflict would be empowered to have meaningful decision-making power in satisfactorily resolving or transforming it. A new approach must be evaluated based on whether it makes societies more just, safe, and peaceful.

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## Texas RJMN Convention—April 1-2, 2005



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By Shirley Orr Smith

The 12th Annual Texas RJMN Convention was a memorable event for the 300+ participants who came representing RJ ministries throughout the United States. The theme *Restorative Justice: A Family Issue* was addressed with enthusiasm and inspiration by the speakers, musicians and workshop presenters. Everyone had a good word of thanks and

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## Religion in Prison

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A recent report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics has revealed some startling information. The total number of state and federal prisoners has quadrupled since 1985.

As a result, tax money that could have gone toward better schools, hospitals, parks, and libraries, is, instead, spent on law enforcement, court costs, incarceration, and the other expenses involved in crime prevention. Recidivism also clogs up the courts, causing long delays in criminal proceedings and even longer waits in civil litigation. It overburdens prosecutors, public defenders, and supporting agencies.

In fact, one of the primary causes of overcrowding is recidivism. Statistics indicate that, nationwide, 30.9% of all paroles are revoked. Fewer prisoners are coming directly from court convictions and more are entering as probation and parole violators from unsuccessful community supervision. In the late 90's an alarming trend started. The highest rate of recidivism, 46.5%, took place among juveniles under the age of eighteen! Of this group, 10.4% are returned to prison for homicide, 18.8% for robbery, and 13% for assault. New York has been about average for the nation, with a recidivism rate of 30.7%. California, our largest state, has had the highest, with up to 54.4%, and Texas, our second largest state, has not been that far behind.

However, despite the dismal reality of government statistics, we at Restorative Justice Ministries Network have a far more positive view, for we see what works, and what doesn't. It has frequently been assumed that the criminal commits crime due to some social dysfunction or insanity. Yet it is our contention that the offender does not have a problem with his mind, he has a problem with his heart. It is that part of his being, his very soul, that we strive to reach as our network ministries reach out in the name of Jesus Christ in correctional institutions all around the nation.

A 90's report prepared by the Family Research Council, and written by Robert L. Maginnis, appeared on the Internet. It quoted Todd Clear, a

Rutgers University criminologist, who stated that "Religious programming is the single most common form of institutional program for inmate management and rehabilitation." A Rutgers University study was also cited. It found that prisoners often seek God to cope with inmate life, which is marked by depression, guilt, and self-contempt. Todd Clear, who did the research, found that highly religious inmates have lower rates of depression and commit fewer disciplinary infractions than other inmates. This is confirmed by Charles Adkins, who is also quoted in the report by Maginnis. Adkins, an Indiana state prison official, says that religion is one of several rehabilitation avenues; but, it's the only approach that addresses the root problem, a moral crisis inside the inmate.

## Martha Stewart urges sentence reform

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The Spring issue of FAIM (Families Against Mandatory Minimums) reports that Martha Stewart since her prison sentence is adding her voice to the outcry against the laws that send so many people to prison for so-oo-oo long.

During her well publicized 6 month federal prison sentence, Martha wrote in an open letter posted on her website last December:

"When one is incarcerated with 1200 other inmates, it is hard to be selfish at Christmas -- hard to think of Christmases past and Christmases future -- that I know will be as they always were for me -- beautiful! So many of the women here in Alderson will never have the joy and wellbeing that you and I experience. Many of them have been here for years -- devoid of care, devoid of love, devoid of family.

"I beseech you all to think about these women -- to encourage the American people to ask for reforms, both in sentencing guidelines, in length of incarceration for nonviolent first-time offender, and for those involved in drug-taking. They would be

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## Victims Voices

With all of its faults, television sometimes captures what many are thinking. In a recent “Law and Order SVU” episode, a rape victim spoke up after 20+ years of silence. The detectives basically told her daughter: “she has found her voice... do not silence it.”

That statement, fictionalized for television, resonates with those

*Justice isn't served until  
crime victims are.*

who work with victims within the criminal justice system, as it has only been within the last 25 years (generously) and only 10 or 15 years (realistically) that victims' voices have been heard.

At times faintly, at times hoarsely, at times gently, at times shouting. But their voices are being heard. That is, if the victim has found her/his voice. And, if someone is listening.

What does it take for the victim of crime first to find his/her voice and then to have that voice heard? I would suggest that it might depend on who is listening. And whether the victim perceives “a safe environment” in which to speak, to express him/herself.

Twenty-five years ago, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first Victim Rights Week in the United States. This year's celebrations, held April 10-16, captured the social consciousness of the movement in the theme: *Justice isn't served until crime victims are*. Logically, it should be “safe” for the victims to speak. In remarks proclaiming the silver anniversary of the observances, President George W. Bush quoted the words of President Reagan: “It is time all of us paid greater heed to the plight of victims.” It is time for the victims' voices to be heard. But is it, yet, safe?

Crime takes a toll on the victims – the ones against whom crimes are committed. Victims are injured in many ways: physically, emotionally, socially, financially and spiritually. This is true whether it happens to the primary victim, or their families and close friends (in the case of murder). Whether they simply allow the injury to exist in silence or

discover that it can be voiced depends on we who believe the victim is a stakeholder in the justice system. Without a voice, the rights, concerns, pains, injuries and well-being of a victim can be...and have been ...overlooked.

Further, Howard Zehr says that restorative justice and “the healing of harms” grows almost organically from “respect” ([The Little Book of Restorative Justice](#)). Respect suggests safety. A question then is: does the system “respect” the victim? If we are involved in the system of restorative justice – in chaplaincy, in ministries, in corrections, in enforcement, in the media, in the judicial process – the question becomes more personal: Do we?

In December 2004, Dr. Marlene Young and John Stein (both of the National Organization of Victim Assistance) developed a historical retrospective of the Crime Victim Movement in the United States which became part of the Office of Victim of Crime's materials for the annual observance in April. Young and Stein identified five independent activities of the movement which converged to place victims' rights as a major player in the field of restorative justice today ([www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrw](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ncvrw)). They were:

1. The development of a field called victimology.
2. The introduction of state victim compensation programs.
3. The rise of the women's movement.
4. The rise of crime that was accompanied by a parallel dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system.
5. The growth of victim activism.

Together, these components have contributed to an atmosphere in which victims' voices can be heard. Are we in Restorative Justice Ministries listening?

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More articles of interest on our website [www.rjmn.net](http://www.rjmn.net)

Use this Ministry ID Key to locate Ministry Emphasis:

\*1=Prison \*2=Non-residential Aftercare \*3=Victim \*4=Professionals \*5=Juvenile Offenders  
\*6=Family \*7=Resources for other RJMs \*8=Residential Aftercare \*9=Jails \*10=By Mail

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See Ministry ID Key on Page 4

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**8**  
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**2**  
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## Book Review: *God and the Victim*

Submitted by Susan Garfield Edwards, LPC  
 Director, Hope for Healing Ministries, Inc.

God and the Victim is a collection of papers presented at a forum on crime victims and the church, sponsored in 1997 by Neighbors Who Care, the former victim ministry arm of Prison Fellowship Ministries.

Readers are invited to consider how theological and Biblical themes such as evil, victimization, forgiveness and justice relate to those who are the primary victims of crime – and ways to deal with such victimization. That understanding can lead to personal and community transformation, and perhaps, to true restoration or the re-establishment of Biblical “shalom,” which Charles W. Colson in his foreword calls “the peace and harmony of the community as God had created it.”

However, the essays also suggest that Christians and the church in general have likely failed “to recognize the needs of the millions of crime victims as a call to ministry” (Lisa Lampman). To that end, a study guide is included with the essays to assist churches to discover ways to offer practical ministry to victims within the church and within the community in which the church exists. An especially helpful “what to do” essay for a church convinced of her calling to ministry with crime victims is a chapter entitled “Go and Do Likewise: the Church’s Role in Caring for Crime Victims,” by Harold Dean Trulear.

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# A New Vision

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A justice-seeking system would view corporate crime on a par with individual crime in its destructive potential for communities and would deal with it seriously. The concept of “safety” must extend beyond reactively removing offenders from their homes and communities and must be reinterpreted to include the long-term health of individuals and communities. The destructive impact of prisons on both must not be underestimated. Finally, a system that values peace will work to create non-violent means of changing behavior.

A new approach must be evaluated based on whether it makes societies more just, safe, and peaceful.

The system we have now is not working. It is broken. Today, the United States imprisons well over two million people, compared with 200,000 people thirtyfive years ago. This number constitutes 25% of the prison population worldwide, although the U.S. accounts for only 5% of the world's population. Approximately 1.5 million children are growing up with an incarcerated parent. Communities with high incarceration rates are characterized by “low levels of civic participation, trust, safety and belonging.” The racial dimensions of the prison boom are well known – nearly 50% of all the people in jail and prison are African-American, while African-Americans comprise only 12% of the population.

Immigrants held in “administrative detention” are the fastest growing prison population in the United States; Congress recently authorized a 40,000 bed increase in immigration detention in the next five years. The average annual cost of incarceration is \$22,650; increases in the cost of adult incarceration have exceeded those of health care, education, and natural resources. There is no conclusive research that demonstrates that this huge expansion of the prison system has had any bearing on the steady drop in crime rates during this time period. States that did not enact harsh sentencing laws experienced the same decrease in crime as states that

the recidivism rate actually went up during the prison-building boom.

## **An Auspicious Moment for Change**

This may be the appropriate moment for a radical paradigm shift represented by restorative justice. The crippling cost of the current criminal justice and prison systems calls the public and its representatives to be open to ideas for change. We can and should insist that funding priorities shift to reflect our goals; that legislatures reallocate monies currently absorbed by punitive systems into investments in health care, affordable housing, drug and alcohol treatment, education, and the environment. We can and should point to the colossal failure of the “War on Drugs” as an example of the inefficiency of law enforcement as a means to address intractable problems rooted in social inequality. The goal of total transformation of our criminal justice and prison systems is not an exercise in impracticality. It may actually become a necessity. No one should be more involved in this effort than Jesus’ people. He gave us instructions to pay attention to those who are at risk. He called them widows, orphans and prisoners.

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*November 13-19, 2005*

*International*

*Restorative Justice Week*

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## **Martha Stewart urges sentence reform**

*Continued from page 2*

much better served in a true rehabilitation center than in prison where there is no real help, no real programs to rehabilitate, no programs to educate, no way to be prepared for life 'out there' where each person will ultimately find her self, many with no skills and no preparation for living...." Stewart left prison on March 6.

By Richard R. Blake



## Sacramento, CA

### Rehabilitation and Re-entry Emphasis Underway

California legislators are joining a national movement among political leaders who are recognizing the benefits of rehabilitating prisoners. The recent trend has been to build more facilities to house the increasing numbers incarcerated because of current criminal laws. This has not been a cure all for the problem of crime.

Economic crisis within California has made it imperative that the issue be addressed. Cost measures are being implemented to put a new emphasis on shortening criminal sentences, restoring early release for good behavior, and providing drug offenders with treatment plans in lieu of prison sentences. Re-entry is another aspect being considered. About 95 percent of all offenders return to society each year. Efforts are now being explored to help these men and women better prepare themselves by getting their GED and vocational training while in prison. Community service organizations and faith-based ministries are working closely with state agencies in a combined effort to assimilate the parolee into the community.

The California Youth Authority plagued earlier by an in-depth investigation is taking steps to be less prison-like and is moving toward a community-based plan of rehabilitation. Former routine lock downs have been cut back and wards are now allowed to leave their cells for vocational classes, meals, and recreation.

## Oakland, CA

### Allen Temple Baptist Church Job Training Program

The Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr. Training Academy recently graduated another class from its eleven week Pre Apprenticeship Training program. Records show that of the 350 graduates of this East Oakland training program for ex-offenders only 5 percent have ended up behind bars again. The training has an emphasis on reading, math, problem solving, and life skills.

## Alameda, CA

### Police Activities League Honor Retired Police Officer

Retired Oakland police officer Margaret Dixon was honored for her volunteer work in the Police Activities League (PAL). At a ceremony held at the Offices of the State Street Financial Institution Dixon was presented with a \$ 10,000 check to be given to her favorite charity. Most of the money was designated for the work of PAL. Recently PAL has expanded their efforts to provide youth with the opportunity to gain fundamental technology for skills needed in today's workplace. PAL's mission is to effect a substantial reduction of juvenile crime in California through proactive community policing. PAL is well on the way to becoming the largest juvenile crime prevention program in the state with an active participation of over 300,000 youth.

## San Quentin, CA

### Death Row Costs Continue to Escalate

The recent death of three-time killer Donald Beardslee has created cause for another look at the rising cost of California's death penalty. Beardslee spent twenty-one years on San Quentin's death row. California has 640 inmates on death row but is hesitant to use the penalty. Other states execute much more rapidly than California. An expensive backlog of delay has been created in an effort to minimize the possibility of error.

## Texas RJMN Convention—April 1-2, 2005



*continued from page 1*

appreciation for the RJMN Board of Directors and volunteer staff for another outstanding convention. Dr. Paul Carlin, Director of the Therapon Institute gave a challenging message entitled *The Three Methods of Cure* at the Friday evening banquet. Dr. Carlin began by saying that the man in the biblical text (Mark 5:1-20) was much like the people with whom we work. The man was out of control, violent, identified more with the dead than with the living, (he lived in a graveyard), self-destructive, he possessed supernatural strength and no method of correction or treatment changed him. He was a threat to society and to himself. He was a repeat offender. Every time a method of change was used on him, it failed and he went back to live in the tombs, the graveyard.

Carlin explained that the three methods of cure tried on the man were:

- 1) The World's Way - The Judicial Method - "chain him"
- 2) Man's Way -The Clinical Method - "tame him"
- 3) God's Way - Spiritual Method - "change him"

Carlin explained that the world's way failed, man's way failed, but God's way succeeded. The first two methods addressed the symptoms. God's way addressed the core of the problem and it was spiritual. When the man was changed, he was in his right mind, clothed and sitting at the feet of Jesus. He never returned to the tombs, the graveyard again. He went home.

Dr. Carlin closed his message with this powerful

analogy: "When Jesus performed His first miracle of turning the water into wine, you want to remember that what went into the pot was not what came out of the pot. Water went in, wine came out. A miracle of transformation took place in the pot. The pot represents the prison. The elements represent the prisoners. There must be that miracle of transformation taking place in the pot if what comes out is not what went in. Reducing recidivism must begin while a person is in prison. It is almost too late once they are released. There must be that miracle take place in the pot."

A first-time attendee, Will York of Gulf Coast Trades Centers, New Waverly, Texas, wrote this note of appreciation, *"I was blessed professionally, spiritually, and personally. The conference provided an opportunity and a great forum to network and reflect on what God has called us to do. The speakers were on time with their messages and provided nuggets to our spirits that will surely bring blessings in turn. The conference was not so large that it lost its personal flavor or touch,"* Leland Maples, Founder of LOOPS, Inc., a regular participant and frequent speaker at the RJMN annual convention expressed words of his experience, *"This was another great convention for Restorative Criminal Justice ministry people. I always leave with new challenges and a refreshed enthusiasm to do them. There was something for everyone, good speakers, testimonies, music, and pertinent information regarding the challenges we face. I thought Paul Carlin's message was extremely timely and stated very explicitly what restorative criminal justice ministry is all about."*



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## *The Voice of Restorative Justice Ministry Across North America*

### Restorative Justice News takes a new form in this June issue

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As you can see, the RJN is in a newsletter form. For nearly 12 years, a wonderful prison volunteer and seasoned newspaper man, John Morrison of Woodville in Southeast Texas volunteered to develop and produce a newspaper for this network. For the first six years it was the INFORMS Newspaper. This office underwent a name change to Restorative Justice Ministries Network and the newspaper changed names at the same time. Through it all, John was there to make it happen three or four times each year. The last couple of years Mike Warren has been a fine editor of this trade journal working alongside John.

John has been called in a new direction. He is the point man whom God is using to establish a Restorative Justice Family Service Center in Tyler County, Texas. Tyler County has a relatively small population. John has become a certified mediator and is encouraging the county officials to

use the center for various mediation activities. This is a pioneering effort in Southeast Texas. It is an example of how God leads us when we stay open to His guidance. Our prayers and our continued interest are with you, John.

Shirley Orr Smith of Midland, who has been the editor of the Youth Matters section of the newspaper has become the editor of the RJN newsletter. She has agreed to use her considerable talent on this issue. We want to thank her for putting her "hand to the plow." We do not know exactly what form the autumn issue will take. Please be in prayer with us about that. We welcome your comments. Please enjoy this newsletter issue of the Restorative Justice News.

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