

# Toward Justice and Healing

*A new initiative at UST Law*

**L**AST year, a new initiative was launched at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, the Initiative on Restorative Justice and Healing (IRJH). Fr. Daniel Griffith, who serves as the Wenger Family Fellow of Law at the law school, also serves as the founding director of IRJH. After a long business career and a recent immersion into the work of Restorative Justice, I serve as associate director of the Initiative. IRJH seeks to name and help heal harm that comes from leadership and institutional failures, racial injustice, and societal polarization. It also seeks to provide law students with the critical skills of empathetic listening, conflict resolution, and inspires them to embrace the vocation of lawyer as healer and bridge-builder.

BY JULIE CRAVEN

While IRJH at the law school may be new, restorative practices are a centuries-old approach to addressing harm in ways that foster healing and accountability. Restorative Justice is rooted in the Indigenous practices of First Nation peoples of North America and New Zealand. Restorative Justice is a philosophical and practical approach to harm that is victim-survivor centered and often involves multiple stakeholders in its attempt to repair harm and restore justice. Today Restorative Justice has become a world-wide movement because of its effectiveness and adaptability to various circumstances. These practices are used successfully in a variety of settings and professions, including in education, criminal and juvenile law, and in response to clergy abuse in the Catholic Church. Restorative Justice invites practitioners to enter the wound of another by accompanying those harmed, as they tell their stories.

So how did a center focused on Restorative Justice come to be launched at the St. Thomas School of Law? The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis was charged with failure to protect children in 2015. These failures caused much harm, both for the victim-survivors who were re-traumatized and often unaccompanied as they sought accountability and healing, and secondary harm shook the faithful in the Twin Cities as media coverage was a near daily event regarding the bankruptcy and news of the civil and criminal charges. As part of the settlement agreement, Ramsey County Attorney John Choi included two



Julie Craven

provisions that encouraged the use of Restorative Justice and restorative practices in the Archdiocese to further the healing of victim-survivors and Catholics. One of the parishes that Archbishop Hebda asked to pilot a Restorative Justice program was Our Lady of Lourdes, and Fr. Daniel and I began the work of training, speaking, and conducting healing circles and listening sessions there and in parishes throughout the Archdiocese.

Fr. Daniel was appointed by Archbishop Hebda as liaison for Restorative Justice and Healing in 2019. This work was further formalized when the Initiative on Restorative Justice and Healing was launched in fall of 2021 to teach law students, and the broader

## Restorative Justice at The Basilica of Saint Mary

As Director of Christian Life at The Basilica, Janice Andersen oversees ministries that accompany, serve and defend our sisters and brothers.

An Introduction to Restorative Justice and Healing Circles program will be held at The Basilica in the Spring of 2023.

## Restorative Justice and Catholic Social Teaching

Restorative Justice is grounded in biblical justice and the practice finds an able and potent partner when it is informed by the Catholic intellectual tradition:

- Values of Catholic Social Teaching | *Restorative Justice approach*
- Life and Dignity of the Human Person | *What was the harm?*
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable | *Who has been harmed?*
- Solidarity | *What are the needs?*
- Rights and Responsibilities | *Whose obligations are these?*
- Call to Family, Community and Participation | *What should be done to put things right?*

legal community, how to utilize Restorative Justice practices within our courts and communities to facilitate healing, build bridges, and bring about a more just and inclusive society. Law, its practitioners, and law schools hold considerable potential to bring about a more just and inclusive society by using law and legal education to build bridges, restore justice, and facilitate healing. In addition to our work at IRJH, I was recently appointed to serve as the ombudsperson in the Archdiocese for victims of clerical sexual abuse.

One of the reasons Restorative Justice has become a global movement across multiple disciplines is because it works. There is, however, a knowledge and awareness gap and one of the challenges with Restorative Justice is overcoming this knowledge gap. Many people do not either know what

Restorative Justice is or are unaware of its unique effectiveness and adaptability in response to harm. Another dimension of Restorative Justice that we have been encouraged by is its strong correlation to biblical justice and Catholic Social Teaching. Both Restorative Justice and Catholic Social Teaching prophetically name harm, both promote personal and collective flourishing, and accompany those who have

been harmed toward greater healing and wholeness. Restorative Justice also bridges to The Basilica's values of inclusion, justice, and seeking the well-being of the city. ✚

*Julie Craven is the Associate Director, Initiative on Restorative Justice and Healing at the University of St. Thomas School of Law and a member of The Basilica.*

Initiative on Restorative  
Justice and Healing



THE NINTH STATION by Lucinda Naylor, used with permission