



**COLLEEN SYM**  
SOCIAL JUSTICE COORDINATOR

Last month I attended a fundraiser in support of an outreach program. Part of the evening was devoted to an auction of Mennonite quilts that had been donated to help raise money. However, the most impressive quilt I saw that night, you could not bid on. Its value was "priceless." This was the "Justice Storytelling Quilt."

The quilt was the result of a project sponsored by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. The Church Council on Justice and Corrections is a national faith-based coalition of eleven founding churches, created in 1974, to promote a restorative approach to justice with an emphasis on addressing the needs of victims and offenders, mutual respect, healing, individual accountability, community involvement and crime prevention. The Anglican Church of Canada is a member of the Council.

Restorative justice is based on a vision of justice that heals and restores. It is based on an understanding that crime is a violation of people and relationships and that justice is served when those most directly involved in an offence are given opportunities to redress the harm caused.

#### Produced by victims and offenders

Meagan O'Shea, a multi-media artist and performer, interviewed and worked with each participant in the project to create the quilt patches and help them tell their story. Stories include those of the parents of a son who killed their daughter, the mother who survived an attack by her son after he murdered her two other children, the wife of a man killed by a teenager.

In all there are forty stories told in the blocks of the quilt. Each patch of the "Justice Storytelling Quilt" is a symbolic descriptive image produced by both victims and offenders from

across Canada. A touch on any patch activates a two minute audio testimony by its designer describing the criminal event that took place in his or her life, what happened and how it felt.

Dave Nomura, a Toronto computer artist who specializes in interactive media, wired the quilt.

The quilting of the textile was done by Susannah and David Shantz. David is a Protestant Chaplain in the Quebec prisons. Through the Mennonite community he and Susannah became involved in victim-offender encounters and it is also through the Mennonite community that they inherited the art of quilting.

#### A flyer describing the quilt explains

"A quilt reminds us of comfort, warmth and security. It protects us from the cold and hostile elements. There was a time when quilts were made from the scraps of material left over from sewing dresses and shirts. There was also the delight of seeing how these pieces could be put together to make a beautiful artistic design.

These concepts are also found in this quilt. It tells the stories of forty very sorrowful and horrifying events and has a way of bringing us together as a community. Since quilts represent a safe place, we find courage to listen to people share the details of the murder of a family member. The artistic image helps to portray the violence in an unthreatening manner. Just as the scraps have purpose and meaning when they are pieced together, so the wounded bits and shattered pieces of our lives can be brought together to project a powerful and peaceful message of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The purpose of the quilt is not primarily to sensitize us to the pain of victims and offenders which could make us very angry and vindictive. It is designed, rather, to bring us together so that we may empathize with the suffering, hope and courage of victims and offenders."

#### Restorative Justice Week

Each year in November, Corrections Canada sponsors a Restorative Justice Week. The quilt was unveiled as part of the ceremonies in 2005. A sermon prepared for this year by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections guides us on how we can foster true justice:

■ By truly living together in community and caring for the whole as much as for ourselves as individuals.

■ By seeing things from a new perspective. We do this by widening the circle to get more diverse opinions and perspectives, and by giving these new perspectives due consideration.

■ By turning the world upside down, as Jesus did. In Matthew 20:16 we read, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." We take ourselves much too seriously and are personally offended if we believe that life has treated us unfairly.

■ By asking the question, "Even if I have not received all that I believe I should, do I have enough?" Is God truly merciful and just?

■ By learning more about our neighbour. We can only truly know ourselves through our being in relationship to others. If our immediate circle is narrow, our perceptions of ourselves will also be narrow.

■ By forming new, creative partnerships and acting together to ensure that God's will is indeed done, here on earth—thus bringing the Reign of God, the Peaceable Kingdom and true justice closer to a lived reality on earth.

In 2007 Restorative Justice Week is November 18-25. To have the Justice Storytelling Quilt displayed in your community contact the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. Or better yet, if there are issues of conflict in your community or simply to build community, think about your own quilting bee to work towards reconciliation and forgiveness or inclusion and diversity.

#### A LITANY FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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Holy and incarnate one  
who longs to set the prisoner free  
and to heal the broken hearted:  
We pray for our brothers and sisters  
who are offenders,  
who stand accused in our courts and  
who serve time in our prisons.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever flowing  
stream.

We pray for our brothers and sisters  
who are victims of crime,  
and who, like many victims, are re-  
victimized  
by our criminal justice system.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever flowing  
stream.

We pray for our Church,  
remembering that in our corporate history  
we have been both offender and victim.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever flowing  
stream.

We pray for all those in our criminal  
system who try to do justice:  
for police officers, judges, lawyers,  
chaplains, and for corrections,  
parole, and probation officers.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever flowing  
stream.

We pray for our neighbourhoods, our  
communities, and our society,  
where the impact of crime and the fear  
that it breeds  
harm people, damage relationships, and  
tear at the human spirit.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever flowing  
stream.

Blessed are you, Lord our God,  
who sent your Son among us  
to bear the pain and grief of humankind.  
Receive the prayers we offer this day  
for all those in need in every place  
and grant us strength on our journey.

Amen.