

Restorative Justice and Healing in a Federal Prison for Women.
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My work as a chaplain for women teaches me a lot about the process of change and healing. Society tends to objectify people in 2 camps: offender and victim. This simplistic notion is hardly conducive for healing. As we become present to each other we create "a sacred space" for dialogue to occur. We learn from the stories. An "offender" has hurt others and has been hurt as well thru the actions of others. Restorative practices ask the right questions. Who has been affected by your actions? When you were hurt how were you affected? What would you say to your victim? What would you like to hear from the one who hurt you? Shame, guilt, anger, resentment and fear are thus openly expressed in safety. Taking responsibility for one's actions is freely accepted as the bigger picture unfolds. One's whole story is validated. The ongoing encounters create a climate for Restorative justice.

An exploration of the song "House of the Rising Sun" paints a picture of the "offender's" "life journey. Family environment and growing up with addiction, abandonment, addiction cycle, prison, choice all present themselves in the lyrics. The song "Fragile" by Sting can motivate us to get involved in restorative practices. We need to get involved because as human beings all of us are fragile and wounded. Restorative practices have built in respect and care. Furthermore the participants find a Voice, often for the first time. The song "I believe I can fly" by RR Kelly puts forth a message of hope that comes out of being accepted unconditionally. True and lasting change comes out of this acceptance. The reality that we are all in this together can be a helpful foundation. It is not always possible for the one who has harmed another to meet with the victim and others directly and indirectly affected. Sometimes it is possible and sometimes it is not. Nevertheless much can be done to bring about healing. Many of the women I respond to have taught me that once they accept that they have in fact been hurt (victim) and hurt others (offender) they can take responsibility and move on. A shift takes place. They make amends by living out their life in integrity and respect. By doing so they contribute to the community in powerful ways. Creating a climate for restorative justice in the way we see each other is a necessary step in the healing of all concerned.