

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Can Restorative Justice Bring Healing to Newtown?

CHARLOTTE, NC, December 21, 2012 – With the recent tragedy in Newtown, CT, Professor Martin Price, a pioneer in Restorative Justice, believes his field may present opportunities for healing in the grief-stricken community. Price, founder of the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program Information & Resource Center, understands that once people have dealt with the early stages of their shock and grief, some will try to ‘put it behind them’ and return to their normal lives as soon as possible. But that will be challenging for most and impossible for others because their worlds have been turned upside-down by the trauma and loss.

Restorative Justice is a different paradigm for understanding criminal justice. It views crime as more than a violation of law. Restorative Justice looks at crime in broader terms by considering individual victims and the community where the crime occurred. First focusing on the victims, Restorative Justice asks, “What harm was caused and to whom?” Then, “Who is obligated to rectify it – to the extent possible?”

After such a horrendous violent event, is forgiveness possible, and if so, when? In Newtown, those who are not ready or unable to forgive may see those who do so as betraying their slain loved ones, potentially dividing families and the community. According to Dr. Price, this is common reaction in the wake of such tragedies. “Forgiveness is a process, not a goal, with each individual proceeding at his/her own pace, or not at all.”

In Restorative Justice, the extent to which the harm is healed is the measure of justice. When offenders cannot or will not make appropriate amends, communities must assume the obligations with the help of Restorative Justice programs. There are about 500 Restorative Justice programs in the US and 6,000 world-wide.

Victim-Offender Mediation, the most common application of Restorative Justice principles, is a process which has brought healing to thousands of victims, communities, and offenders. In Newtown there can be no mediation, because the killer turned his gun on himself; however, Restorative Justice does not require punishment. Despite the fact there is no offender to punish in Newtown, the hope for a sense of justice still exists.

Price believes “Restorative Justice Circle Processes” could be the approach of choice in Newtown. Highly trained facilitators would work hand-in-hand with community members to design and implement a series of large and small group discussions. During the sessions participants sit in a circle with one or two facilitators gently guiding each one in exploring what might bring healing and a sense of justice. “The Restorative Justice process can take days, weeks or even months,” Price says, “and often deeply personal, creative and satisfying solutions for healing emerge.”

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About Martin E. Price, J.D.

Martin E. Price is a social worker turned lawyer, mediator and peacemaker. He is recognized internationally as a pioneer in Restorative Justice and Conflict Resolution. A two-time Fulbright Senior Scholar, his teaching experience includes the Charlotte School of Law, the John F. Kennedy University of Argentina School of Law in Buenos Aires, three National Law Universities of India and the University of Padua in Italy. In January 2013, Professor Price will return to India to teach Restorative Justice at the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research - the top-ranked law school in India, in Hyderabad. Price is the founder and director of the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) Information and Resource Center, based in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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