



# Justice that heals

By Margaret Milne

"Pursuit, capture, arrest, trial and jail." That's how Dr. Michael Hadley, of UVic's Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, describes the steps of the traditional justice system.

"There are two people left out of this scenario — the person who did the crime and the person who's been hurt." In courtroom scenes, victim and offender look on as the real adversaries — prosecutor and defense — match wits.

Hadley is a Canadian leader in the field of restorative justice, which turns the traditional justice approach on its head by focusing on who has been hurt and how things can be made right. "We can't make crimes unhappen," admits Hadley, "but we can try to restore the peace that has been shattered."

Restorative justice takes a number of approaches to healing the harms caused by crime. These include victim-offender mediation and reconciliation, sentencing circles, and family group conferencing. Such methods are intended to allow all concerned to tell their story and find the kind of justice that heals.

"Restorative justice is an international movement," Hadley stresses. "It's one of the guiding principles of the Correctional Services of Canada. It is growing in popularity in Europe and the United States and lay at the heart of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa."

Yet despite this interest in restorative justice, many aspects remain unexplored. Four years ago, Hadley noticed a gap: while much had been written from a Christian standpoint, no one had examined the multifaith perspective. "In our global, multicultural and pluralistic world, it is vital to address this gap," he explains. "Faith traditions continue to shape our reality and who we are — they both form and inform society," says Hadley, "so it's important to understand what they have to say."

"All faith traditions talk about compassion, unconditional love, repentance, and forgiveness," he explains. "These concepts lie



Diana Nethercott photo

**Hadley at the labyrinth built as a restorative justice project jointly by parishoners of Christ Church Cathedral and the William Head Medium Security Institute.**

at the heart of restorative justice."

With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Hadley set out to explore the spiritual roots of restorative justice. He invited scholars from a wide range of traditions — including Buddhism, Chinese religions, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Aboriginal spirituality, and Sikhism — to prepare papers on what their faiths had to say about restorative justice.

He then convened an eight-day retreat at which these scholars and front-line citizens engaged in justice issues — victims, offenders, inmates, police and judiciary — subjected the papers to a tough practical critique.

At the end of the retreat, the scholars revised their research in the light of these discussions. Their groundbreaking studies have now appeared in Hadley's book, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*. The project also resulted in Hadley's synopsis *The Justice Tree: Multifaith Reflection on Criminal Justice*, and two 23-minute videos, all intended for the general public.

Hadley hopes that the project will contribute to the continuing dialogue on restorative justice. He also hopes that even those not immediately involved in criminal justice issues will be reminded of one of the key tenets of restorative justice: that no human being is a throw-away person.

## facts from the **EDGE**

- *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, edited by Dr. Michael Hadley, contains the papers by scholars of different faith traditions who participated in the project. Copies are available for purchase in local bookstores and — for reading — at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society.
- *The Justice Tree: Multifaith Reflections on Criminal Justice* — a synopsis of the project intended for the general public — is available for a small fee from the Centre.
- Two 23-minute videos were also produced. "The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice" is about the retreat. "Journey to the Centre" depicts an example of restorative justice in action. It's about a labyrinth built jointly by inmates of William Head Medium Security Institute and parishioners of Christ Church Cathedral. For more information, contact Gumboot Productions of Victoria.
- The Restorative Justice Coalition — an ongoing project of the Centre — is a group of people in and out of prison who meet weekly at William Head to study restorative justice issues. Their annual conference, to be held in late November, will focus on the experience of victims. For more information, call the Centre at 721-6325.

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- The UVic Centre for Studies in Religion and Society promotes the scholarly study of religion in relation to the sciences, ethics, social and economic development, and other aspects of culture. The programs of the Centre include interdisciplinary research projects, of which "The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice" is an example. The Centre also offers community seminars and a distinguished speaker series. [web.uvic.ca/csrs/](http://web.uvic.ca/csrs/)
- Prison Fellowship International maintains a restorative justice Web site with a wealth of information on all aspects of the topic. [www.restorativejustice.org](http://www.restorativejustice.org)
- The Correctional Service of Canada provides information on restorative justice on their Web site. [www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgmr/rjust\\_e.shtml](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/prgmr/rjust_e.shtml)

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