

## A Country of Peace and Protection

As the federal government moves ahead with a plan to build more and bigger jails, Christians working with prisoners are asking for investments in Restorative Justice instead.

by Eleanor Clitheroe-Bell

As a Senior Fellow of Cardus who has written numerous times on the role of restorative justice, I posit that now, in the midst of a re-definition of Canada's Criminal Justice System, is the opportunity for the government to invest in restorative justice units within institutions. These Communities of Restoration are proven world-wide to reduce recidivism, prevent crime escalation and even to transform individuals from being criminally focused to socially conscious.

Prison Fellowship Canada is a thirty-year-old non-profit ministry working in prisons across Canada. It is part of a worldwide association that includes 120 other national Prison Fellowships.

In the face of crime and conflict, restorative justice is a philosophy and an approach that views crime and conflict principally as harm done to people and

relationships. It strives to provide support and safe opportunities for the voluntary participation and communication between those affected (victims, offenders, and community) to encourage accountability, reparation, and a movement towards understanding, feelings of satisfaction, healing, safety and closure.

Restorative justice approaches help people face the impacts of crime and conflict directly. Approaches such as Victim-Offender Mediation and Community Justice Forums provide support to victims, offenders, and community members. This non-adversarial, non-retributive approach to justice emphasizes healing, accountability, and community involvement to create healthier, safer communities.

### Peace and Protection

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) supports restorative justice within its mandate. The CSC primarily targets education

and mediation through; victim-offender mediation services, education presentations and training opportunities and support for advocacy awards and presentations to satisfy RJ initiatives.

However, when principles of restorative justice become the foundation for prison programming and operation, an ethos of support and trust permeates the environment. Over thirty years ago, a small group of volunteers and professionals proved that RJ principles could be fully implemented in a prison setting, called "Communities of Restoration" (COR).

### Communities of Restoration

The methodology of Communities of Restoration is holistic in two ways. First, it addresses all aspects of the lives of prisoners. They are understood to be physical, mental, relational, emotional and spiritual beings. They are viewed as people who, though they have caused harm to some,

have contributed positively to the lives of others. While they have needs, they also have strengths and skills. Above all, they have worth because they were created in love by God. This inherent dignity and worth cannot be eradicated by anything they or others might do. Nevertheless, many prisoners are so damaged they don't know who they are. A process of human valorisation (discovering one's dignity and value) is needed so that the prisoner can discover the gifted person he is.

The history of CORs begins in the city of San Jose dos Campos of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in the early 1970's. There, a small group of professionals, business people and retirees began visiting prisoners in their local jail on Humaita Street. The leader of the group was Dr. Mario Ottoboni, a powerful Alderman in the city. He was shocked and sickened by the conditions they found in the jail, which was badly overcrowded and unsanitary.

One of the key success indicators of Communities of Restoration is the dramatic decrease in recidivism rates.

The volunteers did more that address the spiritual needs of those prisoners. They also assisted in providing for their medical care, legal assistance, food and their families. Out of that unpaid service grew the "Associação de Proteção e Assistência aos Condenados" (Portuguese for "Association for Protection and Assistance for Convicts"), commonly referred to as APAC. This NGO eventually became the Brazilian affiliate (PF Brazil) of Prison Fellowship International.

As word of the program spread throughout Brazil, volunteers elsewhere began to start their own replications. This demonstrated that the transformation of the Humaita Street Jail could be duplicated by other people and in other settings. Soon community members and corrections officials from throughout Latin America came to Brazil to see this prison that boasted a recidivism rate of less than 4%. The first replication outside of Brazil was undertaken by Prison Fellowship Ecuador in a unit of the Garcia Moreno Prison in Quito. Shortly after that a number of other Latin American countries opened similar programs.

One of the key success indicators of CORs is the dramatic decrease in recidivism rates. Recidivism relates to the tendency for offenders to repeat criminal and anti-social behaviours. In the context of the penal system, recidivism rates are measured by the percentage of people who are arrested for re-offense and the percentage of those that are subsequently re-incarcerated.

Outside Latin America, CORs generally operate under agreements with national governments that provide shared responsibility for security, discipline and administrative functions. There is discomfort in developed countries with the suggestion that the government could legally turn over to anyone its responsibility for security and discipline in facilities, as is reflected in the debates over privatization of prisons.

### Prison Fellowship International

The experience of Prison Fellowship in other developed countries in starting CORs has been one of cooperation and collaboration between the affiliate and the prison service. A useful example is that of Prison Fellowship New Zealand (PFNZ), which has established a partnership with the New Zealand Department of Corrections to offer prisoners in that country the opportunity to participate in a COR. The New Zealand unit is faith-based, incorporating a holistic approach to education, work skill development and spiritual growth.

Kim Workman, past Executive Director of Prison Fellowship New Zealand,

explains the re-offending rates: "Nationally, 25% of all men leaving prison are back in prison within 12 months. Compare that statistic to those prisoners who have left the Faith Based Unit, and taken advantage of our post-release program. Of the twenty-eight men released from the unit in the last year, two have re-offended.

Mr. Workman points out that even a reduction of 5% in the national re-offending rate would mean 350 less inmates in the system – hence avoiding the need to build a costly new prison (approximate saving - \$150m). 350 less inmates in the system would also represent an annual saving of \$21m on annual upkeep." Mr. Workman knows first-hand the magnitude of the impact, as he was the Director of Corrections in New Zealand until his retirement when he donned the mantle of Executive Director of PFNZ for the next eight years.

He says the faith-based system is clearly effective in reducing crime. "We believe the full potential of this response within the criminal justice system has yet to be fully explored."

### Restorative Justice in a Canadian context

Within Canada, statistics vary on current rates of recidivism, with ranges indicating between 40% and 75%. This represents a staggering number of repeat offenders. Significant reduction in recidivism would benefit offenders and their families and communities. Additionally, a dramatic reduction in recidivism on a national scale would translate into positive budgetary change for both federal and provincial correctional systems.

The RJ Unit was established at Grande Cache Institute, Alberta in 2001. It was designed as a stand-alone unit within the larger institution. Part of its mandate was to have a positive impact on the safe reintegration of offenders into the community upon conditional release. The RJU introduced both staff and offenders to RJ by incorporating RJ principles into the daily life of a correctional environment.

The promotion of RJ values and principles, entrenched in the daily functioning of the Unit, were voluntarily embraced by offenders who chose to redirect their lives and to actively address their offences as they served their sentence. To this end, the RJU and its residents facilitated dynamic processes through which offenders could safely address antisocial attitudes, counter stereotypical offender perceptions, and encourage offenders towards an attitudinal shift with respect to their crimes, the residual impacts, and their criminogenic needs.

A number of offenders at Grande Cache RJU have been fully and actively encouraged to become law-abiding citizens. The unit is of a safe, reasonable, and humane environment which fosters respect and understanding of those who have offended and those who have been harmed. A greater emphasis is needed to make RJ available as offenders prepare to live as law-abiding citizens upon conditional release and at the end of their sentence.

Criticism of RJ principles and activities within corrections has its foundation in the implementation of the program. Training of volunteers and staff, communication

Continued on page 19

## Transforming Canadian Prisons: Canadian Christian Heritage

By Jane Harris Zsovan

"Her life might have been much easier. But this was the path she chose—the craggy course."

Eulogy for Agnes Macphail, Canadian Prison Reformer

According to the media and a lot of A right wing activists; good Christians, especially evangelicals, should want tougher sentences and harsher treatment of 'criminals.' But history just doesn't bear up with that perception.

Canadian prison reformers - including Father of Confederation George Brown, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and Canada's first female Member of Parliament, Agnes Macphail -- have often been motivated by their Christian faith.

John George Diefenbaker's interest in the rights of prisoners and the accused began when he was a defence lawyer. Convinced that innocent men were executed and that the Crown won too many of its cases, the Evangelical Christian lawyer became a staunch defender of presumption of innocence and protecting the rights of the accused. His commitment to equity under the law led to the creation of the Canadian Bill of Rights, and spurred his participation in the crusade to end of capital punishment in Canada.

Diefenbaker followed the trail of 19th Century prison reformers including Father of Confederation, George Brown. In 1848, Brown, a staunch Presbyterian, was appointed Secretary to a Legislative Commission of Enquiry into prison conditions at the Provincial Penitentiary at Kingston. His investigation found ample evidence of cruelty and bad management and led to the firing of prison warden.

Brown's 1949 report condemned the "most frightful oppression - revolting inhumanity" in the Kingston Penitentiary. His recommendations sound positively 21st century: separating hardened criminals, first offenders, and juveniles; envisioning rehabilitation and aftercare programs; and appointing of permanent, salaried prison inspectors.

Nearly a century later, Agnes Macphail took up Brown's crusade, turning his recommendations into law.

Elected Canada's first female Member of Parliament in 1921, Macphail was a woman of faith. At 18, drawn to her Aunt's and Uncle's social conscience while she attended teacher's college; she joined the joined their church, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. But she didn't spend much time reading the Book of Mormon. Instead she spent hours reading and underlining passages in Old and the New Testaments. She was particularly fond of prophecies in the Book of Isaiah. Macphail eventually rejoined mainstream Christianity, attending and teaching Sunday School at Don Mills

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Fighting several illnesses during her later years, she retired in 1951. She died at age 63, in 1954.



Agnes Macphail

United Church. She often prayed silently for guidance before votes in Parliament.

Macphail considered her political crusades for women's rights, peace, religious tolerance, farmer's rights, social reform, and prisoner rights, to be a holy mission against the corrupt and powerful interests she believed controlled mainstream politics.

In 1929, she was appointed as Canada's first woman delegate to the League of Nations in Geneva. In 1932, became one of the founders of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) by bringing the United Farmers of Ontario into the party.

But it was her work - building on some of the recommendations George Brown made nearly a century earlier - to end the suffering of prisoners and their families that left the biggest mark on Canadian society. Like Brown she wanted young offenders separated from hardened adult prisoners. She was horrified the fact that many prisoners were repeat offenders. She grieved at the plight of the wives and children of inmates -- most of whom were left destitute while men were imprisoned again and again.

Just as Brown's lobbying had led to the 1848 Commission of Enquiry, Macphail's lobbying led the 1938 Royal Commission that formed the basis of post World War II prison reform.

After losing her parliamentary seat in 1940, a family crisis prompted her to take charge of raising her nieces and nephews. She supported her new household by taking in boarders. During this period of domestic responsibility, she remained on the executive of the Canadian Civil Liberties Union and the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

It was a short break from politics. Representing the CCF, she became the first female Member of the Ontario Legislature in 1943. Her riding was elected for York East. As an MPP, she fought to improve provincial jails for women. Her work led to the founding of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto.

Fighting several illnesses during her later years, she retired in 1951. She died at age 63, in 1954.

# Books/Bibles

## Canadian Bible Society celebrates "the spirit of 1611" with a special KJV 400th anniversary edition

Beyond the launch of a special 400th anniversary edition of the King James Version and presentations explaining the development of the landmark Bible, the Canadian Bible Society (CBS) is seizing the opportunity to underline the spirit behind the King James Version, which is still at the heart of its mandate.

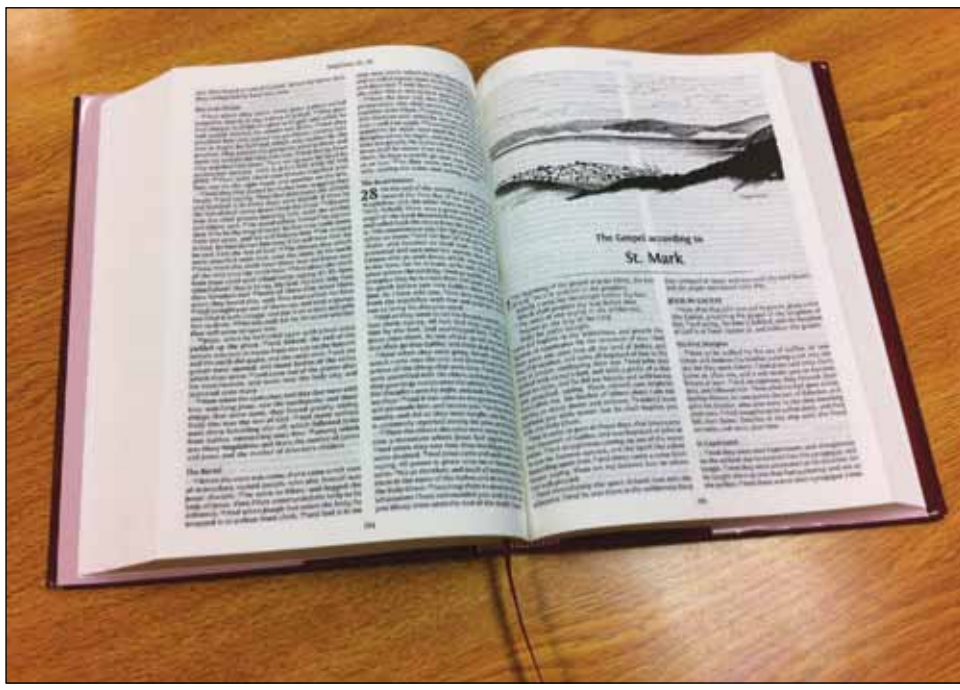
"It may have been called the Authorized Version, but it wasn't immediately widely accepted" explains Joel Coppieters who directs the Scripture Resources department at CBS. "When it appeared in 1611, the controversial new Bible brought the Word of God to the common people, in a language they could understand. A lot of the religious elite thought it just wasn't right to have God speaking in street English!"

The mandate CBS shares with sister societies in over 140 countries around the world insists that God must speak "the language of the street and of the heart", that the Bible must be made easily available and accessible to every man, woman and child.

Sometimes that means publishing it in the right language through the hard work of translation. While the initial impetus for the CBS translation center in Kitchener-Waterloo was providing the Bible to First Nations' Canadians in their heart language, the expertise, tools and resources developed by the Canadian team is now supporting over 400 translation projects around the world.

Sometimes the mandate means addressing economic issues.

"The Bible Societies believe that everybody should be able to buy a Bible for less than the cost of one day's worth of food" Coppieters explains. "And we work creatively with printers, paper suppliers, designers, typesetters and even shipping companies to develop and provide Bibles as affordably as possible to people who can afford to purchase them. Where



The 400th Anniversary Edition of the KJV produced by the Canadian Bible Society in collaboration with the British Bible Society, will be officially released on March 11th at the University of Toronto.

money becomes a prohibitive issue, we wisely invest resources provided by our donors – and revenues generated from sales – in strategic subsidized distribution initiatives."

The 400th Anniversary Edition of the KJV which CBS produced in collaboration with the Bible Society in Britain also celebrates the impressive contributions which it made to the English culture and language. It includes an impressive collection of phrases from the KJV which have found their way into common English use; my brother's keeper, in the twinkling of an eye, no shadow of turning ...

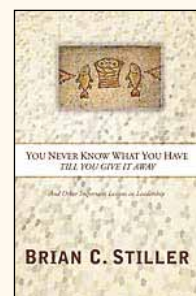
The Anniversary Edition includes a new glossary of archaic and ambiguous words, a specially compiled concordance containing 17,920 terms, illustrated biblical

and agricultural calendars, detailed line illustrations by Horace Knowles, foreword written by Prince Charles and a one-year reading plan. The hardcover bible includes the classic King James text in beautiful paragraphed form and will cost \$19.95.

The official launch will be held on March 11th at the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Collection at the University of Toronto where an ongoing exhibit from February 7th to June 3rd will mark the development of the English Bible and its wide impact. The evening will include a unique presentation and an opportunity to get a privileged inside glimpse at one of the most extensive collections of rare Bibles in North America ... including an original 1611 KJV.

[www.biblesociety.ca](http://www.biblesociety.ca)

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## Put focus on restoring people, not bigger jails

Continued from page 13

between units, standardized reporting measures and consistent support through the re-integration process are tactical activities that can be overcome.

Unfortunately, the Grande Cache RJ Unit has been closed, with funding re-directed towards a different RJ tactic; Victim-Offender Mediation. Within the federal context, mediation occurs directly between the offender and the victim, which differentiates it from other programs which use surrogates to stimulate empathy and repentance. Many PF ministries employ variations of Victim-Offender Mediation as part of programming. PF Canada believes that an integrated approach, combining RJ units with Victim-Offender Mediation in programming, would result in the most dynamic change opportunity.

populations that uphold peace without compromising protection. The methodology is highly adaptable and the results are statistically proven. They are productive in providing alternative reparation and creating a constructive milieu in which the community as a whole can advance.

The fundamental belief in the inherent worth of people must extend to victim, offender, and those in the community at large. By its nature, the true work of justice must insist that we all are restored to discover our potential good, thereby transforming ourselves, our communities and our world.

*Eleanor Clitheroe-Bell is a Senior Fellow at CARDUS, a Canadian think tank inspired by Christian social thought. She is also President and CEO of Prison Fellowship Canada*

### Conclusion

As the Canadian Federal Government grapples with our national correctional system, we choose to both embrace and offer the optimism and hope that restorative justice brings. There is a need for increased spending in areas of transformational programming, the introduction of faith-based units and in Community Chaplaincy and other aftercare providers.

Communities of Restoration are

1 Correctional Service Canada (1998) Restorative Justice and Dispute Resolution Division, Background. Retrieved September 23, 2010 from <http://www.csc-cc.gc.ca/text/rj/rprts/2005-eng.shtml>

2 Petrellis, Tania R. The Restorative Justice Living Unit at Grande Cache Institution: Exploring the Application of Restorative Justice in a Correctional Environment (Correctional Service Canada. May, 2007), 27.

3 Ibid, 33.

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