Virtual all of the world’s religions share the view that we must treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves. How would this apply if we had committed a crime? How would this apply if we had committed a crime? Restorative justice is about repairing the harm caused by crime. Rooted in Aboriginal and other spiritual traditions, it is non-adversarial. It is inclusive—it involves victims, offenders and communities. The framework is one of healing rather than punishment. With offenders, this means helping them take responsibility for their actions and to work to repair the harm they have caused. For victims, it means helping them to be heard and understanding their needs. For communities, it means supporting victims, offenders and young people who may be at risk of committing a crime, as each tries to move forward in his/her own way.

What are your volunteer options? People with a wide range of skills can volunteer. Often, there is training available that can expand your abilities and knowledge. In the correctional system, you can work in penitentiaries or with community organizations.

Volunteering in correctional institutions

Restorative justice can only begin for offenders when they’re released. It may be at risk of committing a crime, as each tries to move forward in his/her own way.

Supporting victims of crime

There are many ways that both faith groups and individuals can get involved. Some options:

- Volunteer support circles—These circles can begin when an offender is incarcerated and they often continue after his/her release. Other times, offenders will recognize the benefit of these circles once they’ve been released and request to be part of one. The volunteer circle is a place for offenders to receive practical advice about issues like housing and finding work, as well as being a safe environment to work through doubts and fears.
- Support to victims of crime—Victims of crime are often in need of support. There are community organizations where you can volunteer that offer helpful services to victims to address their varying needs in the aftermath of crime.
- Specialized support circles—These exist across the country and focus on people who have been convicted of sex-related offences. These groups, called Circles of Support and Accountability or CoSA, boast an impressive success rate and have become models for other countries.

Volunteering in your community

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Volunteering as a faith community

Faith communities like yours that are interested in welcoming someone who has paid their debt to society can play a vital role in helping that person to not reoffend.

Volunteering in special services

- Support to family members of offenders—Families can play a role in helping loved ones to make different choices once they’re released, but these families are often under strain. Supporting families in coming to terms with the aftermath of crime is another important role that you can play as a volunteer.
- Specialized support circles—These exist across the country and focus on people who have been convicted of sex-related offences. These groups, called Circles of Support and Accountability or CoSA, boast an impressive success rate and have become models for other countries.
- Isolation can be a huge obstacle to overcome for people leaving a penitentiary. Faith communities like yours that are interested in welcoming someone who has paid their debt to society can play a vital role in helping that person to not reoffend.
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Empowering others and building safer communities is what volunteering and restorative justice in Canada is all about. To get started and learn more about what you can do, please visit www.csc-scc.gc.ca/chaplaincy.