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## **Restorative Justice and Catholic Ideals: A Restorative Justice Conference Case Study**

Prepared by Jenna Silver for the Restorative Justice Network of Catholic Campuses (RJNCC)

### **The Incident**

In Spring of 2018, Dave\* sat in a classroom preparing for the upcoming class session. A campus safety officer came into the classroom, asked for Dave by name, and proceeded to remove him from the classroom. In response to an anonymous report that Dave was “going to shoot a teacher,” the campus safety officer searched Dave’s belongings in the common area outside of the classroom. The officer did not find anything of concern, nor had Dave made any threats to the community. Dave was not in fact a danger. Nonetheless, the University’s response protocol required Dave to meet with a series of University administrators and mental health professionals as a result.

While Dave was sitting in the lobby waiting to meet with a University administrator, he noticed a flyer advertising Loyola University Chicago’s conflict resolution services. This flyer contains a brief description of restorative justice conferences, noting the focus of such conversations on repairing harm and rebuilding trust. Seeking these opportunities, Dave reached out and expressed feelings of confusion, embarrassment, pain, and betrayal. He believed that his roommate, Andrew\*, called residence life staff in response to a deteriorating relationship between the two of them. While Dave and Andrew were close during their first semester on campus, Andrew had been spending increasingly more time with another group of students who were not particularly welcoming to Dave. Dave expressed a desire to meet with Andrew in safe space to discuss their situation.

### **Restorative Justice Conference**

Once Andrew expressed a desire to dialogue with Dave, we held a preconference meeting. Consistent with key aspects of Catholic social tradition, Andrew demonstrated his commitment to valuing the dignity of the person when he shared feelings of concern, remorse, and pain. He believed that Dave had been “acting weird this semester,” and that he was “worried for Dave’s emotional well-being.” As a result, Andrew reached out to another friend for advice on how to seek help for Dave. Andrew’s concerns quickly morphed, much like a game of telephone, into something much bigger and far more severe. As the relationship deteriorated, Andrew moved out, and Dave lost his friend.

Both students agreed to meet for a restorative conference.

During the conference, both Andrew and Dave drew on their faith as a source of motivation and duty to repair the harms that occurred. Andrew spoke specifically to the guilt he felt for causing Dave to experience events that challenged Dave’s dignity. Andrew also spoke to the internal turmoil regarding his integrity and dignity-- he grappled with his intended care that led to an impact of hurt. He recognized that his actions compromised the common good, another key tenet of Catholic social thought. Dave

spoke to the importance of forgiveness in his personal life and in his community, and identified and appreciated Andrew's genuine apology and ownership over his actions.

The conference closed with a handshake, and mutual—unprompted!—gratitude for the vulnerability that each student demonstrated throughout the process. In doing so, Andrew and Dave again demonstrated their lived Catholic values.

### **Outcome**

Dave and Andrew both shared their appreciation for a space to speak openly about the harms caused and impacts had. Understanding where the other was coming from allowed for Dave and Andrew to have closure on a lingering troublesome situation. Dave and Andrew agreed to say hello to each other when passing on the quad, for example, and to wave when in a packed lecture hall or dining area. While their relationship isn't restored to the state it was at prior to their conflict, the two left feeling satisfied with the dialogue.

\*Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of individuals.

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