

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice focuses on responding to harm as a way to move toward healing, both at an individual and a community level. By contrast, the current criminal justice system focuses on what laws were broken and how to punish people for breaking those laws.

Principles of Restorative Justice

- Focus on the harms and consequent needs of the victim, as well as the harm and needs of the offender and the community as a whole.
- Address the obligations that result from those harms.
- Use inclusive, collaborative processes.
- Seek to put right the wrongs.

The Unity Restorative Justice Ministry Team

The Restorative Justice Ministry Team (the RJ Team) at Unity Church-Unitarian is a group of people committed to promoting Restorative Justice principles.

Unity's Restorative Justice Ministry Team began in the fall of 2003, pursuing social justice by "engaging team members, the Unity congregation, and the broader community in healing conversations and activities."

It uses Peace Keeping Circles to model and encourage inclusive and restorative conversations. Mentoring and providing for the needs of those recently released are other activities. Team members work to improve the lives of all people affected by criminal behaviors through a combination of service, education and advocacy activities. The Restorative Justice Team's Community Partner is Amicus.



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Pen Friends Contacts

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Unity Church-Unitarian **Pen Friends**

A Restorative Letter Writing Project Between Community Volunteers and Inmates



Real change starts on the inside.

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**A Partnership Between
Unity Church-Unitarian and**





Unity Church-Unitarian Pen Friends

Amicus and Unity Church-Unitarian are partnering to help meet the demand for outside world contact for incarcerated men and women in our prisons.

Pen Friends continues a long-term partnership between Unity and Amicus, a nonprofit agency which has been working with offenders, ex-offenders and juveniles in the criminal justice system for over 43 years.

Amicus started with a friendship between Judge Neil Riley and inmate Ted Herman. Riley and Herman spoke about how prison can be a revolving door for many inmates. Even today, about 40 percent of those who leave prison end up going back. During conversations in the prison visiting room, Riley and Herman designed the One to One volunteer prison visiting program with the understanding that positive and lasting friendships can make a real difference in someone's life.

Their vision rings even more true today. Our state's best research confirms that positive connections outside of prison are an important ingredient for success in prisoners reentering the community.

In the spirit of Riley and Herman, Unity and Amicus are now offering Pen Friends, helping inmates establish a positive connection to the outside world through the exchange of letters.



How Pen Friends Works

Through Pen Friends, Unity congregants and friends exchange letters with inmates at selected Minnesota Correction Facilities.

Who is eligible?

Anyone, age 18 and over is eligible to participate. You need not be a Unity member to participate.

Matching

After you volunteer, Amicus will interview you and match you with an inmate who is of the same gender and who shares some common interests. The individual interview will be brief and may often be conducted on the same evening as the training if you wish.

Commitment

You will be asked to write to each other once a month for a period of at least one year. Beyond that minimum, volunteers and inmates are free to continue the letter-writing as long and as frequently as they wish.

Training and Support

Volunteers will receive information and training from Amicus staff which is specifically designed to support participants in the Pen Friends program.

Topics will include:

- program details and frequently asked questions
- discussion of an inmate's life within a correctional facility and what your letters might mean to them.
- Department of Correction rules and regulations you need to follow.
- tips to establish safe boundaries in your writing relationship.
- suggestions about what you might write about and ways to help make it a fun and fulfilling experience. (In general, just write about what comes comfortably to you. You aren't expected to be a mentor or convince the inmate to take any particular action. You are simply writing to offer friendship.)

Support is ongoing. You will be given a contact at Amicus you can call whenever you have a question or concern and there will be regular support sessions conducted at Unity in which letter writers can share their experiences.

Letters

Volunteers will receive the address of their match and will write an initial letter to him or her. You can pick up metered envelopes with Unity Church-Unitarian's address on them at the church and these can be included with your letter. The inmate can use that envelope to mail their letter back to you. You can then reply, continuing the process.

What if I already have a One to One friend or someone else I write to in a correctional facility? Can I still participate?

Yes. Because of the program's affiliation with Amicus, the Department of Corrections is allowing an exemption from the rule of contact with only one prisoner at a time.