

**To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #37**

**Title: COVID Thanksgiving**

This is Thanksgiving week and I expect that it affects all the members of our Restorative Justice community in different ways.

For our members who live at Fox Lake it may be just another day. Not much different than the seemingly endless days stretching into a very dim future. If anything, it may be sadder because of memories of other Thanksgivings and the realization of what is being missed.

For our members who are victims, holidays and anniversaries are often hard when lost loved ones are gone forever.

But for many of our community members, this Thanksgiving is very strange. The news is full of stories and warnings about the critical need for families *not* to be together at Thanksgiving because of the danger of spreading the COVID virus. Many people are in deep despair about having to be separated from their families.

Thank goodness we have our RJ community. We come together as offenders, victims and the community to share our stories and in those stories find empathy. Martin Luther King, Jr. defined sympathy as feeling sorry *for* someone. Empathy is feeling sorry *with* someone.

This Thanksgiving is an opportunity for those of us on the outside to experience, in a small way, the pain of separation that is a daily reality for men and women in prison. As members of the Restorative Justice community, those of us on the outside have an obligation to share what we know about the specific pain of being in prison and separated from friends and family. As people gather around an empty Thanksgiving table, maybe it is an opportunity for a moment of empathy with people in prison.

I am so glad, on this Thanksgiving, to be part of this community.

~ Rev. Jerry Hancock

