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# the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Fall-Winter  
2026 Edition

The Sou'Wester name is a reference to Montreal's Southwest, where Communitas began its work in 1999

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## A Test Drive to Nowhere: The Life of a Parolee on the lot of the CSC

Welcome, discerning shopper, to the most exclusive, least effective used car dealership in the nation: Correctional Service Canada. The lot is immaculately bleak, the sales staff is trained in advanced bureaucratic apathy, and the clientele—the esteemed Parole Board of Canada—has a purchasing phobia that would bankrupt a normal business.

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## Communitas Christmas Party 2025 Wasn't That a Party: Restorative Justice

“Wasn't That a Party!” Are you familiar with the song by the Irish Rovers? A catchy tune, with lyrics like “Could have been the whiskey, might have been the gin. Could have been three or four six-packs, I don't know, but look at the mess I'm in... Wasn't that a party?”

Now some people think you need the gin, or whiskey, or rum, or at least some punch – not true. A good party brings together people. There is a sense of community; there is kindness in the air. You can count on food, friends, and fellowship. New friends, old

friends, familiar faces, and faces that you might not have seen in a long time.

### Now, wasn't that a party?

People will talk about events; people will talk politics; people will talk sports; people will talk about the weather; people will talk about people – but most of all people will talk about being. Being there. Gratitude, and being able to share. At least at a good party that is.

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## Join Us for a Communitas Community Building Work- shop March 13-15

Communitas will be hosting a Scott Peck-inspired Community Building Workshop. This is an opportunity to experience what genuine human connection feels like when a group commits to presence, honesty, and shared humanity. If you've ever wondered what “true community” looks like in practice, this workshop offers a living, breathing demonstration.

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## A Test Drive to Nowhere:

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And me? I'm the flagship model. Let's call it the CSC Reliant. I've been here for years.

I wasn't always this pristine. I had a... let's call it a "previous owner" who really put me through my paces. Let's just say the maintenance schedule was more of a suggestion, and we frequently ventured off-road in a manner that was, technically, illegal. It left me with some dings, a mismatched fender, and a history that makes potential buyers clutch their pearls.

But here's the sales pitch they should be giving: I've been rebuilt! My engine purrs with the quiet desperation of someone who knows the value of a second chance. My transmission shifts smoothly between low-risk employment and approved residences. I start every morning without fail. I am, functionally, a marvel of modern penal engineering. My mileage is high, but so is my reliability. I am the best damn car on this lot.

The problem, it seems, is the aesthetics.

Every few months, the clients amble over for a look. They circle me, kicking my tires with a skepticism usually reserved for a politician's promise. They don't see the rebuilt carburetor or the new spark plugs of reform. They see the faded paint. They

see the small rust spot near the wheel well and whisper, "Recidivism."

They never buy. Oh no. They just take me for a "test drive."

This is the parole hearing. They get in, adjust the mirrors, and take me for a leisurely spin down the straightest, most monotonous road imaginable. No sharp turns. No heavy acceleration. Just a slow, cautious drive to see if I'll suddenly veer into a life of crime or, heaven forbid, backfire.

"The vehicle performs adequately," they'll note, peering over their clipboards. "It has maintained employment and adhered to all conditions of the test drive."

Of course I have! Where else am I going to go? The lot is surrounded by invisible fences. My only other option is the scrapyard!

But then comes the verdict. The moment of truth. They lean in and deliver the line that has become my personal anthem: "However, the Board remains concerned about the... cosmetic damage and the high mileage. We feel more test drives are necessary to truly assess your... uh... road-worthiness."

And back onto the lot I go. To sit. To wait. To get a little rustier.

So what is the future for a model like me? The sales strategy clearly isn't changing. The clients aren't suddenly developing vision beyond the superficial.

Perhaps I'll become a permanent fixture, a cautionary tale for the newer models on the lot. "See that one? Ran a little hot in its

youth. Now it just sits there, a monument to reliability nobody wants."

Maybe I'll eventually be deemed a "vintage" model, where my flaws are rebranded as "character." Though I doubt the Parole Board has a category for "charmingly dilapidated."

Or, the engine they've so meticulously retuned will simply seize up from disuse. The promise inside will corrode, not from the elements, but from the sheer, soul-crushing absurdity of being the most dependable car on a lot where no one knows how to close a sale.

They want a shiny new convertible with zero miles and a clean history. They keep ordering sensible, reliable sedans and then act surprised when they have to sell used ones.

So I sit. I run perfectly. And I wait for a client brave enough to look past the dents and see the machine that still has thousands of good miles left in it. But in this dealership, that's not a customer. That's a fantasy. And fantasies don't have the required forms in triplicate.

*Timothy*

## 2025 Annual Fundraising Campaign

Communitas launched its Annual Fundraising Campaign at the beginning of November 2025, ending on 31 December 2025.

Our target was to raise \$30,000 to allow us to meet the estimated shortfall in our 2026-2027 budget, and we came very close, col-

lecting approximately \$26.5 K when you take into account the associated transaction fees.

During the two months of the Campaign, a total of \$26,962 was received from 42 distinct donors, which was a great achievement. These funds include the contributions received from our fourteen monthly donors in November and December 2025.

We welcome everyone who feels able to add to the number of the monthly sustaining donors of Communitas, thus allowing us to do more reliable planning in the future.

Communitas wishes to thank all donors for their invaluable support for our 2025 Annual Financial Appeal. We cannot do what we do without you!



For the latest news and activities at Communitas, between editions of the Sou'Wester, visit our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/communitasmontreal/>

## Communitas Christmas Party 2025

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### Now what does a party have to do with restorative justice?

Good question. You see, keep away the booze, drugs and carousing – and show people how fellowship, smiles, and yes, fun can be had in a normal setting. Then again, there is nothing normal about having inmates, former inmates, and regular folk – dozens of them – getting together for a good time.

No, it might not be normal, but it can be therapeutic, offer powerful community building, assist with reintegration, and create bonds and fellowship that might not only last but take root and spread.

People might come up to you and say ‘Thanks’. Heck, you might not remember why, but the important thing is that they did, that it was important to them, that they could take the time to show appreciation.

Our carceral system sometimes treats people like animals. That is a fact. That does not mean that people have to act like animals. Some want to show that they care.

## To the Volunteers, Participants, and Supporters of Communitas and the Open Door Group

Please accept this letter as a small token of my deepest respect and profound appreciation.

For several years, first as an inmate on escorted and unescorted temporary absences, and now as an ex-inmate on parole, the Open Door group has been a cornerstone of my journey. It has provided something rare and vital: a place of true community to socialize, exchange ideas, and meet people from all walks of life without judgment. This has been, and continues to be, both a wonderful experience and a genuine privilege.

Some want to share that caring. And a ‘party’ atmosphere allows some people to relax and show their appreciation.

### Now, wasn't that a party?

“Could have been the fruit punch, might have been the lemonade. Could have been the four cheese lasagna, but look at the smile on me...now wasn't that a party?”

A big thank you to Communitas for doing what they do! And don't forget, whether you were there or not this year, there is always next year. Communitas has been around for over two decades and still going strong. And while she could not make it this year, there is always next year for our friend Marie – she is a nonagenarian, so she has seen and done some amazing things. Anyway, Marie once explained that it is hard, virtually impossible, to be angry while you are eating. Yes, breaking bread breaks barriers and establishes camaraderie.

You know how to combat negativity? With food.

You know how to combat negativity? With kindness.

### Now, wasn't that a party?

*Lino*

This brings me to the recent Open Door Annual Christmas Supper. The evening was a beautiful reflection of what this community embodies: it was warm, joyful, and impeccably organized. It was a night where the spirit of the season felt truly present.

My primary thanks go to the many volunteers. You, who come from such diverse backgrounds, educations, professions, cultures, and faiths, give your time and hearts to make this possible. Your dedication is the engine of this program, and your quiet inspiration does more good than you may ever know. Thank you for your kindness and for seeing the person behind the past.

I also wish to extend my sincere gratitude to those who run Communitas. Your vision in supporting and managing these groups provides a lifeline. Thank you for your unwavering commitment, time, and the safe space you foster.



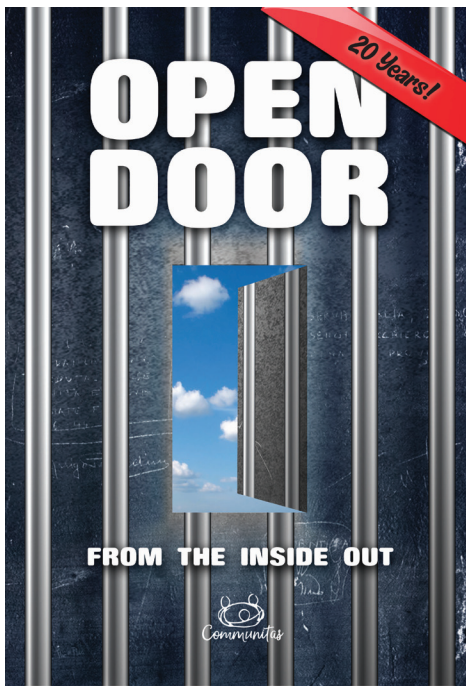
A special and heartfelt thank you must go to Peter Huish. It is my understanding that this initiative began with your idea and has been sustained by your energy through the years. The Christmas supper, and indeed the Open Door [program] itself, stands as a testament to your belief in second chances and human connection. Thank you for making it all possible.

And, as we all noted with a smile—not everyone gets to have the Anglican Bishop at their Christmas supper! His gracious presence was a touching reminder of the inclusive and supportive community you all have built.

In closing, please know that the work you do matters. It heals, it connects, and it reaffirms one's place in the world. You have my utmost respect and gratitude.

With sincere thanks,

TJC



## The origins of Open Door by its founder, Peter Huish

*Excerpt from Open Door: From the Inside Out, 2021*

Open Door was cobbled together to establish connections between the community and the prison where I worked as Chaplain. I was intent on finding and creating ways of opening the walls, so to speak. I went to community organizations and

churches, talking to people who were similarly impassioned about the question of recovering community. In this way, that very ad hoc community group came together.

It began as individual one-on-one accompaniment but it became obvious that in order to make community, some regularly scheduled venue for meeting and sharing was needed – it needed to be an experience that everyone could count on as a regular part of their lives.

I knew it would be particularly important for those who came from prison because there as something dramatically reorienting and transformative in their experience of prison, shared only by others who had also been in prison. Our community gatherings could serve as places where that solidarity was understood and respected.

That was the original motivation: to make sure that there was a place where there could be the experience of true community, an experience which is so

difficult to find elsewhere.

We are often surprised by the arrival of new volunteers at Open Door and by where they come from. It is clear that

people are attracted by what we are trying to do, by who we are. People are attracted by our restorative approach to justice, our efforts to assist healing and recovery for all concerned. People want to

be part of that kind of community and jump in because of it.

My sense of church has shifted and grown around that. Open Door has been an important expression of this shift, becoming the place where there can concretely be the experience and reassurance of communion.

**That was the original motivation: to make sure that there was a place where there could be the experience of true community, an experience which is so difficult to find elsewhere.**

## The Silver Jubilee of Open Door – Let’s Celebrate!

**Question: What do you get when you cross the 25th anniversary of Open Door with the Year of the Fire Horse?**

Oh no! Not another of Jeri’s jokes! Not another groaner!

Answer: No joke, no groaner! In 2026 Communitas’ flagship program, Open Door, celebrates its Silver Jubilee. We’ll be galloping through the year, holding a torch that’s been passed down for 25 years.

Ideas are spinning and everyone is welcome to get involved.

In which areas are you interested in participating?

- Special events
- Writing for the newsletter
- Fundraising
- Finding guest speakers
- Publicity / media relations
- Presenting at Open Door
- Community Partnerships
- Volunteer recruitment and support
- Video
- Sub-committee
- Merchandising

- Open Door refreshments, set up etc.
- Your ideas:

Open Door thrives because we all give and receive so much. If you have ideas, questions or comments, talk with Jeri or email her at

[opendoor@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:opendoor@communitasmontreal.org).

# Sacred Connections

Hello Everyone,

Happy New Year! I hope you all are doing well and keeping warm during this cold long winter! For those who haven't met me yet, my name is Carling. I am the Intern at Communitas for September 2025 - June 2026 but shall be continuing on as a volunteer at Table Talk, Open Door, Gospel Zone in the prisons, and the Sacred Connections group.

Sacred Connections is a new Communitas activity which responds to a call emanating from the most recent Open Door Annual Consultation to have a 'Gospel Zone' type activity for men in the community. Taking place every second Saturday from 1:00PM-2:30PM in Christ Church's Undercroft, Sacred Connections creates an open, safe, and brave space to build support systems and share experiences and open discussions on important topics/themes.

The first session on November 29th explored the meaning of Sacred/Sacredness and Sacred Connections, (our bodies as sacred; sacredness in the ordinary, sacredness in liminal spaces (i.e those in-between spaces/times in our lives); our sacred connections with Creator, with nature, with ourselves and others.

The second session of Sacred Connections on December 27th revolved around Trees. We focused on tree symbolism; trees in cultures, religions, and spirituality; on the sacredness of trees and how they share and support other trees, animals, land, and humans, and how we can too. For our Spiritual moment we made pine cone bird feeders, which are being used to this day!! We also discussed what we can learn from trees in regard to life, pain, grief, suffering, and trauma. This opened up a dialogue dealing with hard and heavy life situations of pain, grief, trauma, etc. but done in a way that allowed for an open space to witness, share, listen to others, and 'hold space' such that no one found it overpower-

ing because it was done in a comforting and sacred way, through trees.

The third session of Sacred Connections, held on January 10th, was about water. We discussed the ebbs and flows of life and how the ebb and flow of the tides and the transition from calm lakes to rushing rivers can mirror the changing nature of our inner emotional world, encouraging us to trust the process rather than fear the intensity of our

of Braiding Sweetgrass, teaches us the lesson her father taught her. "There's a fire you must tend to every day. The hardest one to take care of is the one right here", tapping their finger against their chest. "Your own fire, your spirit. We all carry a piece of that sacred fire within us. We have to honor it and care for it. You are the firekeeper." For the Spiritual Moment we had silence and a candle ritual, in which at the end of the session we

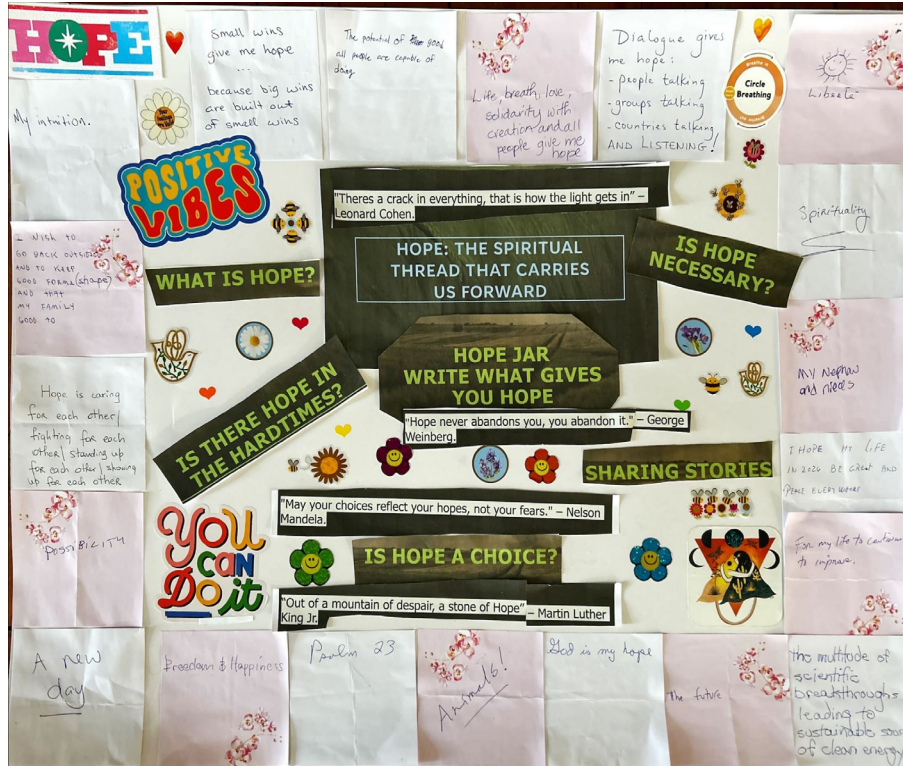
collectively blew out the tea light candles together supporting solidarity and the idea that the light was not extinguished but would now be with and inside each one of us as we went from the place.

We had a Sacred Connections Session at Open Door on January 27th on Hope, where we had men visiting from 600, their first time at Open Door for many of them. We had lots of great discussion on the meaning of Hope, what is Hope? is Hope a choice? Is Hope Necessary, and can we find Hope in heavy or difficult times. We also shared stories with each other on Hope. There was a lot of reflection on the reality that Hope, while really great and important, can

also be very destructive for many men in situations like incarceration given all the waiting, changes & disappointments, one after another, what with trying to get parole and learning things are not going the way one wanted and had hoped. We also did a Hope Jar activity where I asked each participant to write or draw what gives them hope. I then collected the results in the Jar, and at the end of the session I went around to have each participant pick one out of the jar and read it aloud for everyone. After the session it was suggested by one of the men attending that I keep all the "What Gives You Hope" slips of paper and make a collage of them for the Sou'Wester, so I have! I hope you enjoy seeing what gives many of the men, volunteers, and community members Hope.

Blessings, Peace & Love,

Carling, Communitas Intern



emotions. We responded to some reflection questions such as How do you feel when you spend time in or around water? What is our relationship to/with water? We read scripture from John 4:10-14 that speaks to Jesus's metaphor for spiritual life: life-giving water. We asked what is that living water to you? And we reflected on how we might be living water for others. We asked ourselves if we are allowing our tears, a form of sacred water, to flow and create space for recovery and healing, or are we damming them up? The Sacred Moment was a water ritual Blessing.

Our fourth session of Sacred Connections was on January 24th, and we focused on the element of Fire. We entertained some reflection questions such as What does fire represent to you? We spoke about fire symbolism, balance, transformation, and fiery emotions. We learned some fire wisdom of which we need to remind ourselves: that we all are firekeepers. Robin Wall Kimmerer, author

## New Life in the Old Writ

On November 21, 2025, the Supreme Court of Canada once again displayed virtues sadly missing in its corrupt, now shabby homologue south of the border. The heady outcome in *Dorsey v. Canada* (2025 SCC 38) did not add to our right of freedom from unlawful detention: this already was constitutionally guaranteed. But even constitutional rights without a remedy are an empty promise. In *Dorsey* we have a ruling which substantially enlarges access to freedom's handmaid and protector, the age-old remedy of habeas corpus.

How did we get here? The long and winding road begins in 13th century England, when the common law's writ of habeas corpus, Latin for a judicial order addressed to 'you that hold the body,' initially required local authorities to arrest and bring a defendant to the King's Court for adjudication of a case. With time the writ experienced a shift, becoming a procedure invoked instead by a detained individual to force the detaining authority to place 'the body' before the King's Court of Justice for a ruling on the detention's validity.

The later version of the writ was codified into statute in 1640, and again in 1679. By this point, the procedure had come to look like the remedy our Supreme Court describes in *Khela* (2014): an applicant must first demonstrate they are experiencing a deprivation of liberty; if that is proved, they must then show a legitimate ground to attack its legality (which *Khela* found may include a lack of procedural fairness); and if that also is accomplished, then the detaining authority will have the onus of showing the deprivation is lawful, failing which release must be ordered. Note the use of 'must,'—where that last burden is not met, habeas corpus clothes the judge with no discretion to withhold the remedy. In 1982, the common law remedy was elevated to a constitutional entitlement by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (s.10(c))

One readily sees the pertinence of the ha-

beas remedy where an accused languishing in the city lockup claims the police have nabbed the wrong John Smith. (I've seen that happen!) But once the correct Smith is dealt with and marched through the penitentiary doors with a valid warrant of committal, what application can habeas corpus have during the period his sentence compels him to stay put?

The answer is first seen in a key Supreme Court case pleaded forty-six years ago by stalwart prisoners' advocate John Conroy. *Martineau v. Matsqui* Disciplinary Court introduced the notion that prisoners continue to possess a 'residual liberty' interest notwithstanding the basic restrictions imprisonment necessarily imposes. That being true, each decision by prison authori-

### The issue was the right to use habeas corpus to test the legality of decisions moving lawfully sentenced prisoners into segregation or to the higher security environment of the Special Handling Unit.

ties effecting a new or extra reduction in their level of liberty must have proper legal foundation, opening these decisions up to review by the courts.

In 1985 the landmark cases of *Messrs. Miller* (Ontario), *Cardinal and Oswald* (B.C.), and *Morin* (Quebec) were heard jointly by the Supreme Court. (Here I must signal my own vital contribution as articling student to *Morin's* counsel: at the Supreme Court hearing I carried *Renée Millette's* bulky lawbooks, a heavy responsibility.) The issue was the right to use habeas corpus to test the legality of decisions moving lawfully sentenced prisoners into segregation or to the higher security environment of the Special Handling Unit. Speaking in *Miller*, the Court recognized that a more restrictive form of custody "constricts what little residual liberty inmates have left, and (...) habeas corpus is available to challenge unlawful deprivations of their residual liberty, despite inmates not being released back into the public." The Trilogy will always be remembered for spawning the juridical concept of 'a prison within a

prison,' a startling thought at the time but a commonplace today.

With the habeas remedy's relevance for new post-committal deprivations now securely established, attention turned to defining in which correctional situations residual liberty can be said to have suffered further deprivation. This the Supreme Court addressed in *Dumas* (1986), a case in which a parole panel first had granted day parole to take effect if certain conditions were satisfied and then had cancelled it before they were met. The Court took the view that liberty not yet acquired cannot be lost, and denied the remedy. It went on to mold emerging judicial utterances into a non-exhaustive guide from which the courts have not since strayed:

"In the context of correctional law, there are three different deprivations of liberty: the initial deprivation of liberty [wrong Smith arrested], a substantial change in conditions amounting to a further deprivation of liberty [involuntary transfer to higher security], and a continuation of the deprivation of liberty [a level of detention initially lawful be-

comes unlawful without change of degree, perhaps because of extended length or uncertainty of duration]."

Understandably, most useful to prisoner litigation has been the second of these possibilities, as involuntary transfers to higher security, placements in Structured Intervention Units (i.e. segregation), and a host of other administrative actions manifestly involve changes to a prisoner's conditions entailing a new, further deprivation of liberty, leaving little for Crown Attorneys to characterize differently. (It should be noted that not every exposure to a disagreeable condition will constitute a deprivation of liberty. A range of privileges have failed to meet the test: in one Ontario case the move from single to double occupancy did not justify access to habeas corpus.)

For another extensive group of administrative decisions, the presence of a deprivation as defined in *Dumas* has been seen as doubtful, keeping the habeas remedy unreachable. I refer here to a too-familiar feature of prison life, in which the alleged

deprivation results from the denial of a request for less restrictive conditions, as opposed to the loss of freedom suffered when a prejudicial change has been imposed.

Enter the cases of Messrs. Frank Dorsey, a Black prisoner designated a dangerous offender and serving an indeterminate sentence at Warkworth, and Ghassan Salah, a Jordanian national serving concurrent life sentences at Bath, both medium security penitentiaries in Ontario. (For an appreciation of the resistance minority members deal with in attaining lower security consult the websites of PIVOT and the BCCLA.) They challenged their transfer refusals by filing for habeas corpus under Ontario's habeas corpus statute, relying on sections 7, 9, 10(c), and 12 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The parties agreed that the judge seized of their joint applications should set aside the specific reasons for refusal and restrict the debate to a purely legal question: can denial of their reclassification to minimum security be seen as a deprivation of residual liberty as described in the third category in *Dumas*, which then would trigger the next two stages of the habeas corpus procedure?

The Superior Court judge responded in the

negative, finding no equivalence between the imposition of an increase in deprivation, and the refusal to decrease deprivation. The debate moved up to the Ontario Court of Appeal, where a two to one majority rejected the prisoners' appeal, ruling the third situation in *Dumas* was not present and the grounds to proceed to the next stage of a habeas review therefore did not exist.

Next stop—the Supreme Court of Canada. By this time, appellants Dorsey and Salah had reached the date fixed by the CCRA for a new consideration of their transfer requests and had been moved to minimum security institutions. The High Court nevertheless agreed to take up the moot case with a view to clarifying the single issue of whether denial of reductions in security level can open the door to a habeas corpus review.

Were the Supreme Court to rule that a denial of reduction does not injure a prisoner's residual liberty interest, thereby withholding the remedy of habeas corpus in Superior Court, prisoners would be left with the sole recourse of grievance followed by judicial review in Federal Court, an option described thus by the major-

ity in Dorsey: "This Court has previously found that alternative paths are neither timely nor provide as effective relief as habeas corpus." Prison law practitioners will find this a reserved observation. Happily, and to the credit of the Court, and of the dogged litigants, multiple intervenors, and tireless counsel, this did not happen. Instead, the majority ruled that "The effect of being continually held in a higher security facility is substantially the same as an inmate being involuntarily transferred to a higher security facility. (...) Any distinction between the two is erroneously based on a formalistic understanding of a deprivation of liberty."

And with Dorsey in the books, John Conroy could look back over the movement's half-century struggle and say with satisfaction, "The constitutional right to avail oneself of the remedy of habeas corpus to determine the validity of the detention is now firmly in place."

*Steve*



## Being a Volunteer at Communitas

Communitas is, at its heart, a volunteer-driven community. Without the dedication and compassion of volunteers, we simply could not accompany men who have been in prison as they return to society after years of incarceration. Volunteers make it possible for us to offer guidance, stability, and genuine human connection during one of the most challenging transitions of their lives.

Our programs create a safe, welcoming environment where social reintegration can take root. Many of the men we meet feel overwhelmed, isolated, or out of touch with the world they are re-entering. Volunteers help bridge that gap—offering presence, en-

couragement, and a sense of belonging.

There are many ways to get involved, depending on your interests and availability. Opportunities include: helping set up and participating in weekly activities such as Open Door and Table Talk, serving as an escort driver, visiting men inside prison walls, contributing to the Sou'Wester newsletter, assisting with administrative tasks, supporting social media and fundraising efforts and much more, depending on your skills and comfort level

**If you're interested in volunteering or would like to learn more, please reach out to Michele, Jeri, or Bill.**

## Communitas Community Building Workshop

Continued from page 1

Over the course of the gathering, participants will move through the four stages of Peck's community-building model. We begin in pseudocommunity, where politeness and good intentions create a warm but surface-level connection. Before long, the group naturally enters chaos, a lively and sometimes uncomfortable stage where differences emerge and old communication habits show their limits. This is where the real work begins.

With skilled facilitation, the group gradually shifts into emptiness, the heart of the process. Here, participants practice letting go—of assumptions, roles, expectations, and the need to be right. In this quieter, more reflective space, listening deepens and curiosity replaces judgment. What emerges from this shared openness is something rare.

The final stage, true community, arrives not through effort but through collective surrender. Participants often describe a sense of ease, compassion, and clarity. Conversations become more grounded. Silence feels comfortable. People feel seen and heard in ways that are uncommon in everyday life.

For Communitas, this workshop is more than an event—it's an invitation. An invitation to slow down, to connect across differences, and to experience the kind of community that supports healing, resilience, and belonging. Whether you're new to Communitas or a long-time participant, this is a chance to deepen your understanding of yourself and others.

We hope you'll join us and help co-create a space where authentic community can take root.

For more information, contact Jeri at [opendoor@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:opendoor@communitasmontreal.org).

## A restorative justice poem

Questions for the Circle by Ping Showalter

[what happened]

to us?

We criminalize our woundedness

as if we could find answers in ignorance.

In hatred, or fear, or isolation—

this is our system of incarceration,

these are the critical elements of injustice,

be ever critical of them.

Ask yourself

[who is affected]

in the aftermath

of an implosion? Remember:

pain is not disclosed on a rap sheet.

And there is no refuge in that word count.

Please.

Shed the blame and share the burden.

This collateral damage creates needs

that can only be solved through care.

You ask me

[what should be done]

to repair the harm? I say:

go softly, and be steady.

Be resilient and brave.



Be a circle of bent backs. See  
how our constellations of trauma  
are all connected

(the sum of a circle is  
more than those present)

—breathe in—

and notice

how gently our spines

could arc

towards justice.

*This poem is written by Ping Showalter, a Master of Arts in Restorative Justice student at the University of Vermont Law School, and it directly engages the three core restorative-justice questions. It's reflective, grounded in lived experience, and intentionally crafted to illuminate the emotional and philosophical shifts restorative justice asks of us.*

<https://ncorj.org/art/ping-showalter-questions-for-the-circle/>

# Restorative Justice – Ponderings

Every year Canada, and other countries, have a Restorative Justice Week in the latter part of November. But really, Restorative Justice is something that we should be living and sharing daily. Some yearn it, some give it, and some realize that both sides are necessary for healing. Here is a perspective that is worth sharing:

- People need to speak their truth
- People need to be heard
- This needs to be done with respect
- Anger, some, is to be expected
- The sharing must be moderated so that the anger does not turn into hate
- The bureaucracy should encourage these exchanges, not hinder them

Here is one man's perspective – it is raw and it is powerful:

*Dear Reader,*

*My name is not important. I write this not to seek forgiveness, nor to ease my own conscience—for that is not my right—but to give voice to a perspective that I fear is often unheard: the profound empathy for the victim's family's frustration with a process that claims to serve them.*

*I am responsible for taking a life. That is an immutable fact. The anger and trauma I carried from my own childhood became a poison I allowed to spill out, devastating an innocent person and shattering the world*

*of their family. My guilt is absolute. There is no sentence, no measure of prison time, that can balance the scales of the suffering I have caused.*

*In here, we hear about “victim services” and “restorative justice.” We are told that processes exist for families to be heard. But from my cell, listening to the whispers in the yard and reading between the lines of official pamphlets, I have come to understand that these systems often fail the victims the very moment they need them most. The idea that healing for a grieving family could be boxed into a rigid, bureaucratic procedure feels like a second betrayal.*

*The thought of a mother, a father, a sibling, or a child being forced to crystallize their grief—which changes daily, hourly—into an “appropriate” letter months in advance... it feels cruel. To then have to stand and read those frozen words to the back of my head, because some protocol deems it safer or more orderly, strikes me as the opposite of justice. It turns a raw, human need for confrontation, for expression, for the slightest chance of catharsis, into a staged performance.*

*Why not say it to my face?*

*If I have the courage to take a life—a coward's act of ultimate violence—then I must have the courage to sit in the unbearable, deserved heat of their gaze. They should have the right to see the person who caused this pain, to look into my eyes and tell me exactly who I took from them. They should be able to scream, to cry, to ask their questions, to speak the words that burn in their throat that very day, not the words they*

*penned in a different emotional season under someone else's guidelines.*

*A pre-written letter read to my back is for the system. A living, breathing testimony, face-to-face, should be for them. Even if it is chaotic. Even if it is agonizing. Even if I have nothing of value to say in return. That moment belongs to them, not to a parole board's schedule or a correctional service's policy manual.*

*I do not know if true restorative justice is possible in a case like mine. Some wounds are too deep. But I believe it must start with the absolute empowerment of the victims. It must be on their terms, in their time, and in a manner that acknowledges their pain as a living thing, not a document to be filed.*

*For me to sit across from them would be the most terrifying experience imaginable—far more frightening than any prison cell. But that terror is my burden to bear. It is a fraction of the fear and devastation I inflicted. They deserve the chance to place their pain directly in my line of sight and force me to hold it, if that is what they choose.*

*This letter is a testimony from the guilty party. I testify to my crime. And I testify to this: the families we destroy are owed more than procedure. They are owed the humanity of being heard in their raw truth, however and whenever they need to express it. If the system will not facilitate that, then the system is failing its most sacred duty.*

*With the deepest remorse and respect for their enduring pain...*

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## The Unity Within the Grace by the Might of your God

To exist within the might of your God is rapture beyond creation.

Your soul's birth into your Creator's conscience is a celebration worthy of the house of Odin.

You may, if you will it, connect to such purity.

Such a basic thing to belong and be wanted is a worthy obsession.

Understand, you exist because your god intended for you a life of love, compassion, laughter, joy, beauty.

This is why when birthed of a world of purity to a world of struggle, we begin our earthly journey as Angels. Our superpower is our awareness

of such truth, and knowing we all begin enveloped by holy light and return to the house of one's God.

The journey between teaches us of the beloved gift bestowed.

Your God has given you life simply so you may enjoy this gift.

We should give thanks by way of living within the Grace

of such pure character bestowed by the Might of your God.



### The Sou'Wester interviews Tim Smart

*Tim Smart is an Anglican priest and part time chaplain at the Cowansville Medium Security Institution in Cowansville, Quebec. Tim is also a long-time member of the Communitas community.*

**SW:** Let's go back to the beginning. Where did you grow up?

**Tim:** I grew up in Montreal's West Island in Beaufort going back to the early fifties. As a young boy, I was often out and about with my friends exploring the area which wasn't as developed as it is now. We were a little mischievous at times, lighting bonfires and playing with firecrackers, and just being in the great outdoors. It was freedom because we weren't in school. Being in the classroom was really confining for me because I wasn't the greatest student. I guess this is where I developed my sense of sympathy for the men I would later meet who were confined in prison.

**SW:** What inspired you during those early years?

**Tim:** As I said, I wasn't very attentive early on in elementary school until I got to 5th grade where I had a teacher who helped make learning an adventure for me. This inspired me to later attend Queen's University in Kingston to obtain my teaching credentials. I wanted to be a teacher. From there, I was hired by a school in Acadia Valley, Alberta. It had no more than 40 people living there and everyone knew everybody. There was a curling rink and a butcher shop and

not much more. It was there that I met my wife-to-be. She was teaching grades 1 and 2 while I taught grades 5 and 6. We were there for three years and during that time I was feeling called to the ministry. I moved back to Montreal to enroll at the Diocesan College at McGill. So I found myself on the busy downtown streets smiling at everyone and saying hello as I did back in Alberta. The people must have thought I was strange.

**SW:** Once you were ordained, what happened next?

**Tim:** I was sent to a parish in Montreal North as well as to a mission in Mascouche. The people were very welcoming and made us feel right at home. I then was sent to St. Mathias Church in Westmount, and that was quite the change in terms of the types of communities that they involved. Next, I was asked to take on a parish in Sutton so there was yet another move but this time into a community I didn't know a lot about.

**SW:** When did your prison ministry begin?

**Tim:** I was invited to share a Christmas Eucharist at Cowansville, and I really didn't know much about the facility. It was a learning experience for me, and I soon became a volunteer along with Communitas founder Peter Huish. At one point, a man walked up to me and asked me how I was doing. It turns out that he had been a foster child my parents had taken care of occasionally when I was a child, and he was someone that I had really liked. He had been quite the lively child. However, he was in the system as a youth and as happens too often he graduated up to the prison system. So, this was a personal link for me from the early days in Beaufort to the Shawbridge Youth Centre and now a federal institution. And it was someone I personally knew.

**SW:** How important is prison ministry in the reintegration process?

**Tim:** It is super important. The men who come to chapel and some of the other activities want to change their lives. It's where there's the possibility of forgiveness and the hope of redemption without being judged. Meeting with the chaplains and volunteers gives them a tangible second chance. They are being told "We are here for you. We want to walk beside you on this pathway to redemption." There is this developing sense of being part of a community and solidarity.

**SW:** How did being a prison chaplain impact your ministry?

**Tim:** It taught me to be more pastoral. The needs in a parish community are so much different from those in prison. In a small parish community, there are needs but they are not as confining or imposing. In the institutions, there is isolation, loss of freedom, and a need for hope. These are men who made wrong choices and now must find a way forward. For many, they are cut off from friends and family. They can come to us knowing full well that unlike other officials in the prison system, there will not be written reports of what they say that will affect their future. They can open up and find a way forward to heal.

**SW:** What have the many years of prison ministry taught you?

**Tim:** It has taught me about the frailty of the human person. It has taught me that those who have made bad choices can, through hard work and determination, focus on becoming that better person, even if they are inside for 10, 15 or 20 years. The prison system focuses so much on reminding the men of what they did wrong and tries to make sure they acknowledge what they did wrong. They look at the past. Chaplains and volunteers look at it differently, in the here and now. We look at them becoming better people and being human again without judging.

**SW:** What is the highlight of your being a prison chaplain?

**Tim:** The highlight for me takes place every Monday evening as we gather for chapel in the penitentiary: there is singing and sharing, with much that comes from the heart. At the end, inmates and volunteers stand in a circle holding hands, and we each say a prayer or offer a thought publicly or just privately in our heads. It is what binds us together as a community. It is a deep sense of belonging just as we are.

*Bill*

## Reading initiatives In British jails praised by inspectors

*Courtesy of the InsideTime*

Some prisons have created “vibrant reading cultures” with schemes to promote literacy and the availability of books, a watchdog’s report has found.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) praised work at nine jails where governors had made reading a priority. They said that leaders in each prison “made it a core part of the regime, with well-used, active libraries encouraging participation, and prisoners benefitting from interventions that placed reading at the heart of their rehabilitation”.

The report followed earlier reviews by HMIP in 2022 and 2023 which found “serious deficiencies in the teaching of reading across the prison estate” – with the least-literate prisoners receiving the least support, education providers doing little to address low achievement, and libraries still subject to Covid-era restrictions on their opening hours.

Prisons which received particular praise from HMIP in its latest report included:

- Chelmsford, where staff actively sought to engage newly-arrived prisoners by asking about reading and offering a first night book.

- Rye Hill, which has established ‘Drop Everything and Read’ (DEAR) sessions – 15-minute breaks three times a week where everyone, staff and prisoners, are encouraged to read.

- Send, which has an outdoor ‘book nook’ – an unstaffed box where women are encouraged to pick up a book or leave one they have already read for someone else to take.

Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, said: “This report highlights some very positive findings from jails in which committed governors and other leaders had worked together to create a strong reading culture in the prison. Yet we continue to find that reading has not been prioritised with nearly enough commitment in too many prisons.

“I urge governors and the prison service to use the findings from this report to learn from the best jails and improve provision for those in their care, so that they can create more stable prisons which reduce the risk of future reoffending.”

According to HMIP, the successful sites had developed a “whole-prison reading culture”. The report said: “Uniformed staff understood and

promoted the importance of reading. Reading opportunities were advertised and accessible across the prison for all levels of ability, and prisoners’ participation was incentivised, rewarded and celebrated.”

Surveys of prisoners by HMIP have found that 45 per cent say they need help with their reading. Prisoners who struggle with reading are more likely to take drugs, feel unsafe, and spend time in Segregation, according to the surveys.

<https://insidetime.org/newsround/reading-initiatives-at-jails-praised-by-inspectors/>

*Inside Time Limited is a ‘not for profit’ publishing company producing insidetime – the monthly newspaper for prisoners. Any profits made by Inside Time Limited are automatically donated to The New Bridge Foundation.*

*Each month over 60,000 copies of each issue are distributed free of charge to all prisons and special hospitals plus many secure units and hostels throughout the UK. There is also an extensive mailing list of individuals and organisations involved in penal affairs.*

*Inside Time Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of The New Bridge Foundation a registered charity founded in 1956 to help create links between prisoners and communities.*

## Mickey7: A Novel Book review



Do people get more picky as they grow older or is it just that we get more in tune with our preferences? I, for one, am feeling quite picky when it comes to sci-fi books.

Early on, we’ve been spoiled by masters such as Jules Vernes, Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan to name but a few. We’ve been flooded by multitudes of parallel universes, ranging from absurd realities to eerie premonitions - all of which seem to present us with the same question: ‘what if?’...

That’s what does it for me - when a sci-fi book brings us into state of deep questioning.

“Are we alone in the Universe?”

“Could machines eventually feel pain?”

“If my body were to teleport, would I be me on the other end?”

Mickey7 tells a futuristic tale of space colonization through the narration of an ‘expendable’ adventuring through alien worlds and familiar problems. The writing

style is friendly, does not take itself too seriously. It’s a light enough read to be qualified as a guilty pleasure.

But if you look closely between the lines, mixed into the storyline and characters, you’ll find that deep state of questioning: other than biology, physics and chemistry, what is it that makes us human? Could it eventually all be quantified and stored on disk somewhere?

Often, after putting a book down, I fall asleep in a matter of seconds. But in this case I’d be left awake with a nagging feeling in the pit of my stomach. I needed to reflect on what I just read. I needed to validate ideas with what I thought was ultimately possible. I needed to pretend to embrace a future singularity when humans and machines merge.

That’s when I knew I had got myself a good sci-fi book.

*Nicolas*

# Please support **Communitas!**

**Communitas is a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization which welcomes (ex-)offenders back to the community by supporting them in their social, spiritual, emotional and practical needs.**

We rely heavily on support from individual donors like you. The stigma associated with work in this area brings unique financial and other challenges with it and so your contributions are essential in sustaining our important work.

I support Communitas and their programs and am enclosing a donation of:

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## **Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) at Communitas: Is it for you?**

Communitas is proud to have introduced Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) to Quebec in 2000 and have provided more than 50 circles since. COSA matches individuals with a history of sexual offending with a group of everyday community members who are committed to helping you navigate the challenges of life in the community and achieve a successful, crime-free life.

If you are interested in hearing more about the possibility of having your own circle, contact:

[cosa@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:cosa@communitasmontreal.org)

[coordinator@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:coordinator@communitasmontreal.org)

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