

Building a Church-Based VORP

*"Many seek an audience with a ruler,
but it is from the LORD that man gets justice."*
Proverbs 29:26

I remember when Pastor GL Johnson and I were talking about the effects of crime in our city. We were meeting with Ron Claassen and Tony Redfern from VORP. I had heard of VORP for many years. In that meeting we discussed the possibility of what God could do if the Church in Fresno began living out the Biblical principles of reconciliation, forgiveness, and justice in our community.

We caught the vision of VORP that day, and Peoples Church made a commitment to become a church-based center for VORP. We also began to pray that this would be the beginning of many Fresno churches that would embrace this incredible program and seek to extend the church's influence to places where we as Christians rarely become involved.

So, the letters went out. Phone calls were made. We scheduled our first training for March 3 & 4, 2006. Tony Redfern and Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, along with Jenna Preheim and Johnny Phouthachack, led 22 of our church members in a great training! We were challenged in many ways and learned so many incredible skills. At the end of the training several in the class took their first cases to mediate!

How often have we picked up the Fresno Bee to read of the brokenness in our community due to crime? We drive down our streets and see graffiti and spray paint. Have we ever wondered what we could possibly do as Christians about the effects of crime in our city?

As Proverbs 29:26 clearly says it is from God that man gets justice. What is justice? The world looks at justice from the viewpoint of the courtroom and the verdict. For both the offender and the victim, justice is harder to define. Punishment, restitution, institutionalization, and the effects of crime destroy persons,

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Success Story

At 16 years of age, Ryan was charged with receiving stolen property. He is now 20 years old and leading a completely different life. He partly attributes his change of lifestyle to VORP.

After Ryan and 7 friends broke into a tow yard and stole property, he and his mother met with the victim and two VORP volunteer mediators. Ryan says he then realized how much the victim was affected by his actions. He also saw how it had impacted not only the Tow Business, but the broader community. His mother was able to tell her story of what happened as well. She expressed how the offense had concerned her and how she felt that it would effect him in the long run. An agreement was reached.

Johnny Phouthachack, the VORP agreement manager then helped Ryan to complete his agreement. Johnny says, "The reason I was able to work with Ryan is because there was an agreement with the victim thanks to the help of our volunteer mediators. It is amazing to see volunteers devote their time to help individuals like Ryan. It shows they have strong passion in this program". Johnny reflects, "Ryan came to me with a lot of commitment and motivation to get his agreement done. Most importantly, it seemed to me that Ryan felt he owed it to the victim and community to make things as right as possible. The first step for him was guidance. I tried to give him hope because he didn't feel right about what he had done. We always let offenders know they have a second chance. We give them an opportunity to walk through the right door and earn what they want in life." Ryan shares his perspective. "I thought Johnny would be like everyone else and just give me a hard time. But Johnny was not like that, he called every few weeks to ask how I was doing. We would go out to lunch. Courts were not a big deal to me, but when someone actually takes time to meet with me and help bring in different views it means a lot. He showed me such a different perspective. He was someone I liked and trusted." Johnny put a lot of time into helping Ryan find a job, encouraging him in school and helping him to choose positive friends. Ryan stopped hanging out with people that were influencing him in negative ways. Johnny says of Ryan, "He accomplished his goals. He completed his agreement and he is making good life decisions."

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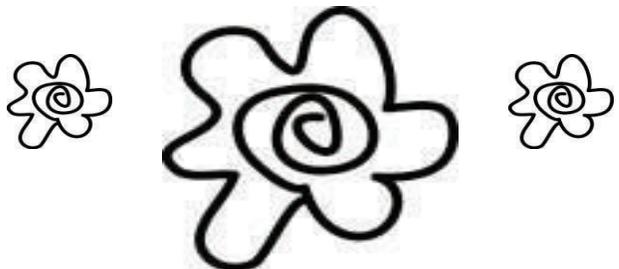
Volunteer Mediator Training

May 19-20, 2006

Friday 6:30pm - 9:30pm

Saturday 8:30am - 3:30pm

Call 455-9803 to reserve a spot.



("Building a Church" continued from previous page)

families and the community. What would the Lord have us do? We know there is an incredible problem here ... what can we do?

Peoples Church decided to get involved. We believe that the Church has the singular responsibility to do justice and speak the message of reconciliation. We see VORP as one of many of our ministries to bring the love of God to the community. Our hope is that those who have been hurt by crime will see the concern of the Church and that this will be a witness to the community of Jesus' commitment to healing, restoration, and the love of Jesus to both victims and offenders. We believe we are called to do this!

We would like to thank Tony Redfern, Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, Ron Claasen, Jenna, and Johnny for training us, supporting us, and encouraging us in our adventure of faith. I would like to invite you to come and be a part of the Church-Based VORP in Fresno.

Ron Blalack
Associate Pastor
Peoples Church
Fresno, CA

* PLEASE CALL VORP AT 455-9803 IF: You *
* have time to volunteer helping coordinate projects *
* and supervising kids while they work. Or if You *
* have a project at home that you could use a little *
* help with: housekeeping, cleaning out the garage, *
* yard work, washing the car etc. *

VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	Administrator
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Jenna Preheim	Mediation Manager
Joe Montanez	Intern
Barry Guenther	Finance Manager

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"At first it was a struggle. He needed some resources and there were not a lot of job opportunities. I give credit to Ryan because he didn't stop; he kept trying and ended up getting a job. From there, he continued to get job offers left and right. He got himself back on track. He is a hard working guy."

After 4 years, Ryan is continuing to make good decisions and is still closely connected with Johnny. Ryan is now married and expecting a baby. They recently moved to Missouri and Ryan is currently enlisted in the army for a 3 year term. He said "VORP helped me stay out of trouble and my bad record is lost. That helped me get into the army." Ryan laments about the fact that only 2 of the 8 offenders involved in the crime were referred to VORP and got the opportunity to make things right with the victim.

Johnny and Ryan plan to stay connected. "Johnny and I will keep in touch. I call him, he calls me. We're more like friends."

It is very special to have someone like Ryan make a change in his life. It is important for the community to continue their support for VORP. Hopefully more special individuals like Ryan will have the opportunity to make things right.



" Power is only important as an instrument for service to the powerless."

Lech Walesa

VORP Board Members

Michael Blue, Chair	Arthur Wint
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Eleanor Richards	

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
of the Central Valley, Inc.



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