

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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VORP News - August 1984 - Fresno County

A VORP GATHERING is being planned FOR October 4, 1984. Our main speaker for the evening will be Judge Fitch, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court, County of Fresno. We want this to be an occasion for volunteers, financial contributors, board of directors, staff and others interested in VORP to get together for inspiration, encouragement, and celebration. We will gather at the fellowship hall of the College Community Church in Clovis. We will also share a potluck meal. The details will be included in the September newsletter. Please place this date on your calendar now.

While Fresno County VORP is an autonomous organization, we are loosely affiliated with the other VORP's that are springing up across the country. There are at least thirty that are organized and operating at various levels. There have been several hundred inquiries about the possibility of starting VORP's that have been sent information either by the MCC Office of Criminal Justice or the PACT Institute of Justice. As the interest in developing local VORP's increases the legislators have also begun to take an interest. In April, Howard Zehr, the director of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Office of Criminal Justice, was invited to prepare written testimony and also to speak before the Criminal Justice Subcommittee in relation to Representative Conyer's (D-MI) sentencing reform bill, H.R. 4827. Howard's points about victims' needs and the necessity of offenders facing up to what they have done were well received by Chairman Conyers. It is encouraging to note that some of our legislators do take note of and are interested in a program such as VORP.

Howard Zehr and the MCC Office of Criminal Justice put together a Network Newsletter which is available free to persons interested in Criminal Justice. The newsletter contains some articles by Howard and some others active in the area and reviews some books, magazine articles, and newspaper articles that they think are relevant and might be of interest and helpful to their readers. One small section in the May-June issue was on Public Punitiveness and he has given us permission to reprint it here.

Politicians frequently cite popular demands for punishment as justification for get-tough policies. Yet a number of observers are suggesting that the public may be less vengeful than is often assumed.

A recent survey in Illinois, reported in the Jacksonville (Ill.) Journal Courier, found that two-thirds of the persons surveyed favored alternatives over prisons. Sixty percent thought the purpose of prisons should be to rehabilitate, 26% thought they should protect society, and 14% said they should punish. Anger about crime was high, but that did not translate into simplistic solutions. ---Reported in John Howard Association Update, March/April, 1984 (Illinois)

There is no charge for the newsletter although contributions are appreciated. If you would like to receive this newsletter you may write to MCC Office of Criminal Justice, 220 West High Street, Elkhart, IN, 46514/

Something that we have learned that we didn't expect is that the number of juvenile arrests is down in the summer months and tends to peak during school time and especially near the ends of the semesters.

I look forward to meeting you at the VORP Gathering.

Shalom  
Ron Claassen