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## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP News - February 1985 - Fresno County

We are serving more victims and offenders than ever before. As this indicates, we have a good working relationship with system officials and this is the result of the reliability and high quality work of our staff and volunteers.

Six new volunteers were trained in the January Training and all are working on cases now. Your encouragement and prayers will be welcome as they meet with victims and offenders and offer their assistance. They are: Leslie Barton, Bob Barton, Mark Siemens, Greg Stobbe, Leslie Mark, and Rhoda Stauffer.

Just a year ago we welcomed Gail to our staff as our first full-time person serving as both case manager and mediator. She came to us through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program and lives on a subsistence allowance in order to help victims and offenders while this 'ministry of reconciliation' matures. I asked her to share some of her reflections on her involvement during this past year.

In college, I was taught a healthy cynicism toward society in general, and toward the "me first" attitude, which seems to be so prevalent, in specific. I came to believe that the Christian way is fundamentally different than the society which tells us to conform to the standards of success at any cost. I believe that the Christian's action is to be motivated by a sense of mercy, an ingrained understanding that I am the same--not better--as everyone else because I am aware of my own fallenness. If I can show compassion and mercy it is because I am aware of how badly I need compassion and mercy in my own life.

When I decided to accept the job with VORP, it was because I believed the program to be founded in the kind of mercy toward others that is only possible when Christ is present. I told a friend, "By society's standards, this program of reconciliation over revenge doesn't make sense. I think it is the politics of Jesus."

Over the past year I have become convinced that VORP does practice the politics of Jesus, as do the volunteers, Board, financial supporters, supporters from the criminal justice system, and my fellow staff workers, Ron and Roxanne Claassen. Criminal justice is traditionally a function of the state. Many people prefer to not get involved. All of the people involved in VORP have a vision that there are better, more redemptive outcomes possible and they put in the time to see the vision become reality. I can honestly say that I get a sense of amazement and gratitude when I think that so many people, motivated by faith in the power of reconciliation, make VORP work.

I feel equally amazed in thinking about victims and offenders who participate in the program. It is true that there are some offenders who participate simply to stay out of more trouble and some victims who participate strictly to get the restitution. But just as often I have found victims who are willing to show concern and offer peace to the offender. I don't really understand what motivates people to this kind of goodness and it always surprises me. It always seems to be a holy attitude. Then, too, there are offenders who are truly repentant, who truly want to make peace. I'm thinking of two boys, twelve and sixteen years old, who both told their victims, "I know now that I'm in control of my life and it's up to me to make good decisions. I've decided to not get in trouble anymore." Is this not the heart of what the Bible calls "repenting"? Victims and offenders, whether

they know it or not, often practice the politics of Jesus.

Perhaps the positive side of my cynicism is that when something comes along which seems good to me, it really seems good. I celebrate VORP. I regularly feel joy and gratitude for the Christlikeness of all those involved in VORP. I believe that VORP is motivated by mercy. I believe that Christ is present.

Our Board of Directors decided not to apply for city of county funding this year and that our funding should continue to come from individuals, churches, church agencies, and other non-governmental sources. In doing this they also renewed their commitment to continue to each personally financially support this reconciliation ministry.

We need your help in getting the word out. VORP volunteers in Fresno County are meeting with many people ( more than 1,000 individuals in 1984 ) who are experiencing brokenness due to a criminal offense. Our volunteers are helping victims and offenders to restore equity through emotional and financial restitution. While reconciliation is not a process that can be forced, that is often the by product of the process. Victims and offenders are helped to deal with the offense and to put it behind them. We need your help in sharing this good news with people you know. Our Board of Directors is convinced that if people know what is happening they will want to know more and will want to participate.

If you would like a group you are involved with, your business, service organization, church, Sunday school class, or Bible study to hear more about this "ministry of reconciliation" please call Ron Claassen, 291-1120.

Our next volunteer training session is scheduled for April 18 and 25, 1985. The training consists of two four hour sessions, 6:00 to 10:00 PM and on-the-job-training as needed. We need more volunteer mediators.

We also have financial needs to provide support staff and resources for our volunteers. If you would like to participate in the ministry by contributing on a regular basis you may do that by completing the form below.

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\_\_\_ Yes, I/we would like to become a helper in reconciliation by investing monthly in the way indicated:

\_\_\_ \$100    \_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_ \$15    \_\_\_ \$10    \_\_\_ other

\_\_\_ Yes, I/we would like to become a helper in reconciliation by investing quarterly in the way indicated:

\_\_\_ \$250    \_\_\_ \$200    \_\_\_ \$100    \_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_ other

\_\_\_ Yes, I/we would like to become a helper in reconciliation by investing yearly in the way indicated:

\_\_\_ \$500    \_\_\_ \$250    \_\_\_ \$100    \_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_ other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Adress \_\_\_\_\_

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On behalf of victims and offenders, we thank you for your interest and prayers.

Shalom  
Ron Claassen