



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP News - December 1985

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among all people."
What a beautiful vision!! This is the vision that our mediators have in mind as they work on each case. It is this vision and expectation that provide meaning and purpose to each meeting. Reconciliation and peace happen when the vision is shared.

The victim who said in the police report, "the offender has been caught and should be shot" changed his mind when the offender took responsibility to "make things right." Without an invitation to consider 'peace' the bitterness would have continued.

In a case involving co-offenders where realations had been deteriorating for three years to the point of physical threat, VORP mediators helped work out an agreement to resolve the problem. The following quote is from a letter written three months later. "...as far as the problem between (co-offender) and I, there is none. We do not bother each other or get in each other's way. I have no scared feelings while attending school anymore. All is going ok. Again, I can not express my gratitude to you for your help in solving what was a very bad situation. I appreciate it very much and will never forget it. Thanks again." The co-offender wrote in her report, "Everything is going great. No problems what-so-ever."

VORP volunteer Ken Janzen, reported that after the completion of a meeting recently where things had been worked out between the victim and offender for 'making things right' the victim said, "This is amazing grace." Both felt restored.

Greg Stobbe reported that at the end of a meeting last week when he asked if anyone had anything else they wanted to say, the offender after looking at her mother and being encouraged warmly to share said, "Because of what has happened I've decided to live a new lifestyle and become a Christian." Her mother was happy.

I think that this is what Christmas is all about. VORP volunteers, contributors, board of directors, and staff share this spirit of Christmas over the whole year with victims and offenders.

In 1985 we have worked with an average of 27 referrals per month. We are grateful to all who have made this possible. It is important to note that it is in cooperation with court and probation officials that referrals happen and we appreciate our good working relationship. Don Hogner, Fresno County Chief Probation Officer recently said,

"VORP's methodology is fundamental to the restorative process for both victim and offender. Probation respects the efforts of the VORP Program."

Since the message of peace and reconciliation is for the whole world, I thought it would be appropriate to share with you how VORP is spreading.

In the San Joaquin Valley it is spreading to Tulare County and some people in Madera County are considering it. There have been many inquiries throughout California. There are about 35 VORPs operating that we know of in the USA and many more in Canada.

Howard Zehr, who will be our guest speaker on March 13, 1986 (this is the date of our VORP Gathering to which all of you are invited) made a report recently on the spread of VORP in Europe and following are excerpts from that report.

"Reconciliation between victim and offender is happening, not just in North America, but in Europe as well."

"During the past two months I have experienced some of these developments first hand. In October, I was the only North American to participate in an all-European probation conference held in Karlsruhe, West Germany, focusing on 'victim-offender reparation'."

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"Following that gathering, which brought together about 60 representatives from 16 European nations, I went to England to visit programs and participate in several seminars with people involved in victim-offender programs. Then, in what was for me an important climax to the trip, I was able to meet with the Pope and express my appreciation for his act of reconciliation with his attacker. I came away from these experiences excited about what is happening in Europe."

"A wide variety of programs are being developed and tested in a number of countries."

"Some programs are much like our Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs in North America. Others focus less on criminal cases and more on community mediation programs. And some fit neither model."

"Although there is still some confusion of terminology and concepts, many programs represent a central concern to take seriously victim as well as offender needs and to encourage direct, mediated encounters between the two. Most are concerned in some way with reparation of wounds and relationships."

"While many North American programs are operated by independent organizations and groups, European programs frequently have some governmental sponsorship. With this organizational base, it is not surprising that many of the European programs have a secular tone. I was pleased, though, to find significant Christian involvement and motivation in the movement. At the Karlsruhe conference, for example, a stirring paper by an English chief probation officer traced the origins of the victim-offender reconciliation concept to the Old Testament prophets' concept of justice."

"The biblical concept of 'making things right' was frequently heard."

"The North America VORP model has played a role in this European movement..."

"...there is also evidence of indigenous roots and forces giving rise to the movement in Europe. VORP can also be seen as part of a wider interest in mediation and "reparation" throughout the western world."

"Exciting things are happening to the idea of victim-offender reconciliation; ripples of interest and ideas are moving outward from various sources, joining one another, creating waves. But will the ripples continue to spread or will they die out?"

"The victim-offender reconciliation movement faces some hard questions in the next few years. Will funding continue? Can such goals as reconciliation and restoration operate in a system that focuses primarily on punishment? Will the reconciliation emphasis be lost? Will the victim-offender reconciliation movement lead to a new, more biblical understanding of justice or is it just another fad, doomed to become an historical footnote? The next few years will be decisive."

In Fresno County, VORP is offered as a gift of the 'church' to victims and offenders. On behalf of victims and offenders, thanks to all of you who have made this gift possible.

If you are not already contributing in some way, this is an invitation. You are invited to join us in extending the spirit of Christmas. You can become involved.

Volunteer as a mediator. Our next training will be on January 23 and 30, 1986. The sessions will be from 6:00 to 10:00 PM. each evening. Volunteers are encouraged to work with one case per month (approximately 3-8 hours). Call 291-1120 to register. No fee.

Contribute financially. Our support is from churches and individuals.

*As our financial support grows, we will be able to serve more victims and offenders. A regular gift of \$10 per month is substantial. If you can give more that would also be appreciated.

Pray in addition to the above.

I wish you a meaningful Christmas, and as you consider how you will live in our world in 1986, that the spirit of Christ will permeate your thoughts and guide you.

Shalom,
Ron Claassen, Program Director

*Thanks to generous givers and a \$4,500.00 grant from Mennonite Mutual Aid we are ending 1985 in the black.