



## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

VORP News - August 1986

Victim/Offender mediation and reconciliation is a growing idea. At the national gathering of people who are doing something like VORP forty-two programs were represented. This is up from 30 last year and 16 the year before. In some ways it is very small. The form it is taking in various places is very different. Motivation and direction and primary goals also vary. We are implementing VORP here because we (contributors, volunteers, staff, and board) see reconciliation at the heart of the gospel message and important in all parts of our lives. So we implement VORP from a faith motivation. VORP is being recognized as something worth considering by a much larger group because 'it works'.

I was invited to present our VORP program at a California Youth Authority Transfer of Knowledge Workshop in June. The focus was on how the religious community is involved in serving victims of violence. I met one person from Los Angeles and one from England, both had a very high interest in implementing the VORP idea. The person from Los Angeles is also working with mothers who have lost children in gang killings. These mothers are going to the scenes of gang violence and encouraging them to break up and go home. In the area they are working they have reduced gang killing from 18 last year to 2 this year. We intend to communicate further.

As a result of that workshop I have also been invited to present VORP on September 9 at the NOVA Conference (National Organization for Victims Assistance). I understand that the organization has approximately 18,000 members. It was interesting for me that at the VORP Conference one of our speakers was from the NOVA staff in Washington, D.C. She was very helpful in sensitizing us further to the needs of victims. At the end of one presentation she was asked what those in NOVA who know of VORP think of the idea. She candidly responded that the assistance to victims is welcomed and that the idea of reconciliation and our also being advocates for offenders is viewed with skepticism. We were clearly reminded that the idea of being an advocate for both victim and offender is not a common or popular idea yet.

Terry Amsler from Community Boards in San Francisco was another speaker. They train people in communities to help people resolve problems before they become crimes. I would like to see that idea modified to help train people in our 400 churches in Fresno to enable them to become Community Justice Centers. Justice, in the biblical view, is "making things right."

Dan Van Ness, President of Justice Fellowship (Chuck Colson's sister organization to Prison Fellowship), also attended the VORP Conference. He was particularly interested in our VORP because of its close tie to the religious community. We talked about the possibility of assisting prisoners who make a decision to follow Jesus in their life to meet their victims and make things right with them. We talked about the problems and benefits of this for both victims and prisoners. We talked about the problem of thinking that just putting more people in more prisons will solve our crime problem.

Needless to say, it has been a stimulating summer. My hat is off to our staff, Christine, Greg, and John, and the many volunteers who have kept VORP running smoothly. We experienced our highest number of case referrals in our history in July. The number of potential victim/offender match-ups was 47.

On the unfortunate side, July was not our highest month in donations. We are struggling now. Our budget is still low, less than \$40,000. If everyone receiving this newsletter gave just \$10.00 per month we would meet our budget with some to spare. We don't want giving to VORP to be a burden to anyone. We hope that you will enjoy and share in the joy of spreading God's message of reconciliation. This month is a good time to give.

Our next volunteer training is scheduled for September 30 and October 7. If you are interested in increasing your skill in helping people communicate and resolve problems and if you see value in reconciliation in your own life and want to share this idea with others, then you are a good candidate. If after attending the training you decide that you are ready for case work you will be invited to work with one case per month. If you find you are not suited to this work you are under no obligation. Please share this training opportunity with a friend. Pre-registration is necessary and may be completed by calling our office - 291-1120.

One volunteer who works not only with us but with many other programs and was recently recognized by the Optimists of Fresno and given the 1986 "Friend of Youth" award, is John Bergey. Following is a case he worked with recently. The names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

It was my fourth case and was quite different from the cases I worked on previously. The case involved one victim and two offenders. The victim was an apartment complex. The manager, Mrs. Jones, was approximately 45 years of age. The two boys, Joe and Frank, were 16 and 17 years of age. They had lived in the apartment complex with their mothers for four years. All parties knew each other quite well.

The boys were arrested for killing fish in the pond of the apartment complex, breaking light globes and bulbs, and for writing on the apartment walls. I met the boys and their mothers about six weeks after the arrest. Joe's mother was very talkative. Frank's mother was open and expressive and tried hard to encourage her son to come clean with the whole story. It was easy in some respects to work with them because they were open to help and to getting this situation settled in a good way. They were working mothers and had other children to care for. The boys readily admitted their guilt and described what they had done. However, they denied doing the amount of damage which had been reported by the manager. Joe, Frank and their mothers all agreed to participate in a meeting with Mrs. Jones.

The next day I visited the manager of the apartment complex to hear her side of the story and to answer any questions she had about the process. She was open and agreeable to the joint session. A joint meeting was arranged.

The following day Frank and the two mothers were waiting at Mrs. Jones' office when I arrived. Due to transportation problems Joe did not show up. Since Mrs. Jones had an appointment following this one we went ahead with the meeting rather than waiting for Joe. The meeting opened fairly easily since all parties had known each other for the past few years. I asked Frank to tell his story first which he did briefly and in low tones. Frank's mother questioned him several times to bring out more details. She told Frank to be sure to tell the truth. After a short pause Mrs. Jones asked, "Why did you do this Frank, especially after I warned you so often not to?" Frank responded by saying, "I guess I was bored." Mrs. Jones listened to Frank as he explained his side of the story. Although the amount of damage which Frank accepted responsibility for fell short of the total amount of damages done, Mrs. Jones acknowledged that children other than Frank and Joe had also contributed to the damage. She began adding up the items that Frank damaged and destroyed which included the globes, fish, and the walls. The total cost for repair to these items for which he was responsible amounted to \$135. Frank agreed to this amount. He thought that it was fair and said that he could pay it off in the next six weeks. Frank mentioned that his goal of buying a bike would have to be delayed because of the payment. A contract was drawn up and signed by both parties and myself.

A few days later a meeting was held between Mrs. Jones, Joe, and Joe's mother. I began again by having Joe tell his side of the story. Joe readily admitted that he had killed two fish, and removed two or three light globes and had spun them on the floor. His mother expressed quite a bit of concern about why Joe did those things. She shared that she had been having problems in relating with Joe and that this might have been one cause for his behavior. Joe confessed that he had been experiencing some anger and frustrations. We discussed what Joe could do if he felt frustrated and angry in the future. He responded by saying that he could talk about these feelings with a trusted adult. We also discussed his leadership qualities and how they could be used more constructively. When the discussion turned to restitution, everyone agreed that Joe would pay a total of \$112 for his share of the damage. Mrs. Jones expressed her concern that the boys pay this and not their mothers. This was heartily agreed upon. Both Joe and Frank had received jobs for the summer through the Youth Employment Program as aides in nearby schools.

Thank you, John, for your work on this case and for sharing it with all of us.

Shalom, Ron Claassen, Program Director