



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley Inc. News
March 1987

Now is the time to request your free tickets for the VORP GATHERING on March 26, 1987. The purpose of this gathering is to celebrate what is happening each day in the lives of victims and offenders by bringing together those who make it possible: volunteers, financial contributors, staff, and others who are interested and supportive. This year our guest speaker is Daniel W. Van Ness, president of Justice Fellowship and author of the book "Crime and Its Victims" published by Intersarsity Press. In 1983 Prison Fellowship, Chuck Colson's ministry, created an affiliate organization, Justice Fellowship, to support a growing interest and activity in criminal justice reform. Chuck Colson says in the forward of the book, "Dan's book is a unique blend of experiences, the keen insights of a finely trained legal mind--and the compassion of a committed Christian heart." We look forward to hearing from Dan about his concerns and how VORP fits into the larger picture.

Make your reservations now by calling Greg Stobbe in our office. Please feel free to invite a guest to introduce them to VORP.

Date: March 26 -- Time: 6:30-9:30

Place: Cedar Avenue Baptist Church, 535 N. Cedar, Fresno

Consistent with our participatory program we are planning to eat a potluck meal together. If your last name starts with A-M please bring a main dish and rolls, M-Z bring a salad and dessert. Table service, coffee, tea, etc. will be provided.

Our case story this month is from volunteer mediator Ed Barton. Ed is a member of First Presbyterian Church in Sanger and he is also a teacher.

My first VORP mediation came about because a young teenager had been involved in marking all over the walls of an apartment with a felt pen. The apartment had just been cleaned and repainted and had already been spoken for by a renter.

My first mediation was done with Jim Van Wagenen another VORP volunteer. Jim had made an initial phone call and visit with the offender and her parents. The girl agreed to go through the VORP process.

Jim and I met with the victim who was also willing to meet with the offender to work out restitution.

Later Jim and I met together with the victim, the offender, and her parents. We all introduced ourselves and began.

We directed first the offender, and then the victim to tell their respective stories with all the feelings that they experienced.

The offender was very embarrassed to have to face her victim who had to have the apartment repainted and in the process had also lost several days of rent money because of the incident.

The victim was obviously hurt by the damage done to his rental apartment. The young teenager recognized her mistake and her responsibility for the damage done, by making restitution. The victim wanted to cooperate with the girl and make her restitution something which was reasonable in terms of the time allowed to repay him for the damage done and the rent lost.

The girl agreed to pay for the damage at the rate of \$20.00 per month until the total bill was paid. She would work at odd jobs until she earned and paid off all that was required.

Contract was signed by both victim and offender. As each left there were warm handshakes and smiles by all parties involved in the process.

I observed something I had never had an opportunity to observe before. Two strangers, one victim and one offender had come face to face to make things right.

I saw an embarrassed but also happy girl walk away with her parents feeling good about making restitution for damage she had caused. I saw a victim who was willing to help a teenage girl straighten her life out.

What a great feeling I had as a volunteer mediator in the VORP process because I was able to be involved in bringing a victim and offender together to make things right for both of them.

Since the meeting and signing of the contract a slightly different arrangement for payment has been worked out. The offender offered to pay in full now (by borrowing from her mom) or preferably wanted to wait until her summer job starts. The victim agreed to wait until summer.

Thank you Ed and Jim for your efforts to facilitate healing and restoration for these individuals.

Seventeen people just finished the volunteer training. They are: Kris Upton, John Unger, Viktor Reimer, Susan Vasquez, Bryon Born, Peter Kochen, Lorenzo DeLeon, Ray Wiens, Robert Burt, Lorne Willms, Fritz Peters, Dave Kleschold, Robert Thiesen, Franz Rathmair, Phil Born, Abe Ediger, Jack Swartzendruber. The training includes mediation skill development, conflict management models, models for reconciliation, and instruction and role play related to the VORP PROCESS.

Our next training will be on April 21 and 28 from 6-10 PM each evening. Call Greg Stobbe for reservations or further information.

Staff support is needed for each volunteer and each case. Larry Willms has just arrived to serve a five month voluntary service term with us. He will be working particularly with restitution follow-up and with case work. His home is in Kitchner, Ontario, Canada and he has lived most recently in the Sojourner community in Washington DC. We are pleased he is here.

There is cost involved in supporting volunteers who live on a subsistence allowance. We continue to rely on the generous contributions from individuals and churches for our total support. Thank you for your continued support. This February the number of individual contributions was almost double the number of last February. Regular donations of \$10, \$20 or \$30 per month are greatly appreciated. If you prefer donating annually that is also appreciated. Financial statements are available on request.

Shalom
Ron Claassen

Thanks for your contributions. They are needed. They are providing our financial support. Our expenses are kept low through donated space, printing, volunteer mediators, volunteer board and young people who have volunteered to live on a subsistence allowance while serving our community. Financial statements are available on request.

In addition to growth in Fresno County and Tulare County the VORP idea is spreading. Last week I helped train the first volunteers in San Luis Obispo County. Next week I will be meeting with a group of people interested in starting VORP in Santa Clara County. There is also a group that has indicated intentions to develop VORP in Alameda County. At least 10 other counties have indicated some level of interest. These are all people from the church community wanting to serve the needs and help victims and offenders "make things right" between them.

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director

2529 Willow Avenue • Clovis, California 93612 • (209) 291-1120

The Ruth-Heffelbowers
1610 Stevens Ave.
Elkhart, IN 46516

V. O. R. P.
2529 WILLOW AVE.
CLOVIS, CA 93612

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The final meeting took place on a cold, wind-swept and rainy evening in the VORP office with the Dhillions, myself, and Bobbie and his mother participating. After introductions, Bobbie explained that after the ball game, they did not have a ride home. When Jerry and his friend rode by it seemed like a good way to get home, so they stole the bikes.

At that point in our meeting, the power failed in much of Clovis and the office went dark and silent. I quickly asked whether we could wait this out for a few minutes. All agreed. No one spoke as hopes stirred for the power to be restored. We waited 5 minutes in cool stillness before I asked if we should go on. Surprisingly both families said "sure!" So the meeting continued; six silhouetted individuals seated in a circle, resolved to share feelings and discuss ways to correct the wrong committed.

Bobbie broke the silence and said, "I was a part of the robbery but did not hit Jerry." Jerry, when asked to share his feelings and recollections said he had been hit several times and knocked off his bike and agreed that Bobbie had not hit him.

"While it was dark that night, I think the other boys actually hit me," Jerry said. "I was angry and scared the rest of the evening."

"I can appreciate that," Bobbie replied, "because I nearly had my bike stolen a couple of times too and know what it feels like to be on the other side." Bobbie then asked Jerry what he thought about the boys who had done this to him?

"I hate them." Jerry went on to ask whether he could get his bike back but was told that it had been given away once the boys got home.

Jerry's mother then shared with the group how upset and angry she had been over this incident. She was also afraid to go out alone at night and told of her daughter's fears as well. She couldn't understand how Bobbie could do this, especially knowing how Jerry could feel. Jerry then said how he had worked the whole spring and summer to save up for the bike and now it was gone.

Bobbie slumped in his chair. "I didn't know this has caused so much trouble," he said. "I didn't know. I don't have any hard feelings towards you and wasn't trying to hurt anybody. I'm sorry about your bike and causing you all so much trouble. I want to pay back my share of the cost."

Later, it was determined that Bobbie would pay \$100 towards the replacement of the bike.

At the end of the meeting Bobbie said, "You know, I'm gonna tell the other guys they need to meet with you...to face you like I did. They need to know what you told me."

I asked Jerry if this was a good idea to meet like this? He said, "Yeah it is. I'm glad I met Bobbie because now I know what kind of a guy he is and that he wants to make it right between us." Jerry's mom also said much the same.

As the lights were still out, I suggested we brave the storm and sign the contract in their car. And as we did, the boys shook hands and exchanged addresses.

"I've never seen Bobbie so sincere," his mom said. "He's never opened up like that. Thank you for giving us this opportunity."

Thanks Greg.

Our case load is increasing. In March alone we received 51 referrals. To meet this caseload we need more volunteers. Our next training will be April 21 and 28. Each session is from 6-10PM. If your church does not have this training noted in your bulletin please do what you can to get it included. VORP offers training and an avenue of sharing God's peace with our community. Call Greg (291-1120) if you are interested or if you need more information to put the announcement in your bulletin.