



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY, INC
DECEMBER 1987 NEWS

Jesus' birth announcement was preceded with:
"Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of
great joy which shall be to all people."

Jesus later said:
"You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate
your enemy,' But I say to you,
love your enemies."

This was part of the good news. It really does bring joy. This love is not a gushy, warm feeling but one person's commitment to respect the dignity of, to care for, and to value the other. This is a first and basic step in the process of forgiveness that leads to shalom (peace, health, and wholeness). Forgiveness happens when among those in conflict, the injustices are recognized (confession in biblical language); the equity is restored (restitution), and future intentions are clearly in a cooperative direction (repentance, not groveling but turning to go in a new direction). In our relationship with God there is no restitution due, Jesus took care of this. This is also part of the good news.

This process is never forced. People are invited to join in and are encouraged but are always free to make their own choice of whether to participate. VORP volunteers invite victims and offenders to consider participating.

This month our account of a real VORP experience is shared with us by Allen Guenther. Allen has been working with VORP cases as a volunteer mediator now for over two years. He is also a professor at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. Some details have been changed to protect identities.

I was nervous. And impatient. Five people were to show up at 7:00 p.m. and by 7:15 no one had arrived. Were my directions given poorly? Could it be that all four victims as well as the first offender on the list would fail to show? At 7:20 the first victim arrived. The offender and two more victims and their spouses came in a rush just before the half hour. We decided to begin, so we went into the VORP office and got under way.

Part of my discomfort was due to the number of people involved in this reconciliation meeting--four victims and three offenders. To speed the process and reduce the total number of meetings I decided to ask all the victims to meet together and then we would call in the offenders in turn.

About a month earlier a high schooler had been talking to his friends during a break. School was a bore. Would some of them want to go for a ride? The ride took the rest of the day. They enjoyed the countryside, one another's company, and cruising past the driver's friends' school in Clovis.

Then cruising became a bore. To liven things up, the driver reached under his seat and pulled out two air pistols. From this point on the stories clashed. According to the driver, he began shooting out the passenger window and encouraging his friends to do the same. He claims they followed suit; they claim he was the only one to fire the pistols. The victims found the friends' story the more coherent and believable.

The final score on the target practice was one dent in the inside of the door on the passenger's side, four shattered car windows, and three high school hockey players in police custody.

My personal visits with each of the victims and offenders had been very cordial. I learned something about the offenders. The driver and instigator of the escapade had recently been diagnosed as having a serious heart defect. He was to have open heart surgery within two months. The

doctor had told him he could die at any moment. And that was the argument he had used with his friends--"I don't know how long I'll live. Let's go have some fun." The other two were followers. In both cases, their parents had taken control after the incident. "They had done their community service, taken their corrective classes and completed their assignments. Each was willing to make restitution.

All four of the victims were wary, initially, but responded positively to the idea of a meeting with the offenders. One didn't show up. They apparently decided against participation. I made two personal visits and at least three phone calls listening, explaining, and inviting participation. The three victims and their spouses described their anger at finding their car windows broken. And they explained the frustration of lost work, unnecessary bother and personal violation. The offenders listened.

I was particularly pleased to hear the victims question the offenders: "Is this your first offense? Why did you do it? How would you feel in my position? Do you cut classes often? How are your grades at school? Do you have a job? How will you repay us? When?"

I breathed a sigh of relief and a prayer of thanksgiving after the meeting. The three victims and each of the offenders and their parents agreed that the experience had been important for them personally and was a good way to restore health to the community.

One victim, who said their loss was completely covered by insurance, didn't participate so I wouldn't call it a total success. But the three offenders all repaid their thirds of the total claim. I was given a number of opportunities to explain the Christian values which motivate me to volunteer my services for this work. Finally, I enjoyed a fine visit with the driver the day after his open-heart surgery.

Thanks Allen

One limitation on how many cases we will work with is how many volunteer mediators are available? If more were available our case load would be increased. Does being a mediator sounds like something that would interest you? If it does you are invited to join us in our next training sessions. They are scheduled for January 20 and 26 in the evening. For further information call Todd or Gretchen at 291-1120. Training includes some general conflict management material and mediation skill development in addition to learning the VORP process.

One other limitation is our capability to facilitate and coordinate the efforts. We depend entirely on individual, church and business contributions for finances to support these efforts. At the end of November we were \$900 short of being able to pay all of our expenses through that date. When you are deciding where you will make your contributions this month, please consider contributing to VORP.

I will give a full report on our statistics next month but one you might be interested in at this point is: Case referrals through November: this year 361; last year 262.

Because of volunteers and financial contributions the VORP process is offered as a gift throughout the year. Many offenders are accepting responsibility, many victims are open to working things out with the offenders. Healing and reconciliation is happening. Merry Christmas

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director

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