



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
June 1988

"The purpose of VORP is: 1. To encourage and assist the church in its mission of peacemaking in the conflict between victims and offenders of crime." Our mission statement goes on with three other major points but I would like to focus on this one at this time. We who are Christians have been taught and believe that the church does have a mission of peacemaking in our relationship with God and in all areas of our lives and our world. One of those areas is victims and offenders damaged by crime. We believe that in every church there are at least a few people who would like to be peacemakers with victims and offenders if they knew of the opportunity and the structure and support of the VORP organization and personnel.

Through May, 193 Cases have been referred to VORP in Fresno County since the beginning of this year. This is a substantial number and it would be larger if we could handle more. Even at this level, every day volunteers are giving time and caring expertise and compassion to help victims and offenders consider working through the conflict that has occurred between them. Not everyone responds immediately to the invitation with enthusiasm. The work of a volunteer is often frustrating and takes a great deal of perseverance and patience. It is also very rewarding.

Our story is from a volunteer from the Valley Christian Center. Simone Ostrander is a teacher and working on her High School Counseling credential. The names and some details have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.

My first case. I chose the folder out of a cluster of case files Gretchen had spread out on the table. I contacted the offender, Soutchay, that evening, and soon discovered he was the only one in his household who spoke English, a fact that made future phone calls difficult. He had jumped into a fight between a friend of his and Manuel at a lunchtime on his high school campus. Soutchay had kicked Manuel in the face while he was on the ground, breaking his nose. Soutchay spoke softly but warily as I identified myself. Yes, he'd been told I'd call, but why was I interested in him? Would there be money involved? Since he didn't want to meet in his home, I suggested the VORP office and he agreed.

Next I called Manuel, but his mother could speak no English and Manuel was not home. Luckily my daughter speaks Spanish, so I arranged to have her call Manuel's mother and interpret my message to her. Manuel's mother was also wary. She feared the hospital, doctor, and ambulance bills would come. She was grateful that VORP was interested in her plight, and gratified that someone could speak Spanish to her.

Meanwhile, Soutchay did not show up at the VORP office. I called later and asked if I could meet him at his High School. He was agreeable and arrangements were made. We finally met face to face. He agreed to meet Manuel and was hopeful that this would mean he wouldn't have to come up with a lot of money. He had no job and his family was receiving financial assistance. I told him the conditions of restitution could be flexible and that getting together with the victim for reconciliation was intended to be a healing experience. He relaxed as we talked and agreed to meet with Manuel.

After several phone calls I finally made contact with Manuel, who agreed to meet with me, although when I went to his house he wasn't there. I left a note with his mother and made several more phone calls and finally made contact with him again. He agreed to meet with Soutchay and me, politely assuring me he would be there.

The day came, I picked up Soutchay, and as we drove we chatted about job possibilities. I told him then that I didn't think there would be any monetary restitution since Manuel's mother's insurance covered the full amount. He was relieved. I asked him if he had three wishes what would

they be. He said he wanted to be happy, and that meant his family would stay together and move to a nicer place to live.

We arrived at Manuel's and he was there and ready for us, as was his mother. I explained the procedure and directed Soutchay to begin. He explained how he'd jumped into the fight between Manuel and Soutchay's friend. He said that he had done this because it was the custom of his culture to help each other. He added that he had been thinking about this a lot in the last two months. He spoke softly to Manuel about his feelings, noting that when he saw him in convulsions and the blood from his broken nose, he was very frightened. He said he was sorry he did it like that now.

Manuel translated Soutchay's words to his mother, who visibly relaxed toward Soutchay. Then Manuel briefly stated that he had been quarreling with Soutchay's friend and was angry that Soutchay had jumped in. He added that now he had no negative feelings about Soutchay, that he also believed it was honorable to stick up for a friend and then ended by saying he gave Soutchay credit for "having the guts" to come over and meet with him.

It was a great moment!! We discussed that there would be no remuneration due because of the insurance and all signed a contract specifying this. We parted shaking hands and Manuel and his mother bid us goodbye.

Thanks Simone, Soutchay, Manuel, and Manuel's Mother

"Blessed are the Peacemakers"

The next training for VORP volunteer mediators is July 19 and 26. Each evening the sessions will be from 6:00 to 10:00PM. There is no fee for the training. There is no charge to the victim or offender, the service/ministry is offered as a gift of the church.

We also believe that some of you will want to be involved but cannot be volunteer mediators. You can participate with VORP staff, volunteers, victims, and offenders with your prayers and with your financial contributions. Thank you to all of you who are contributing through your financial gifts. Your contributions make stories like the one above possible. If you are not yet contributing and wondering if your contribution is needed, the answer is yes. Our goal is to serve all appropriate cases and in order to handle more, we will need more staff support. Regular monthly gifts provide VORP with a stable base of support, and periodic one-time gifts (investments) are equally important in enabling volunteers to offer the possibility of "reconciliation."

A special thanks is in order to the people from Habilitation Inc. who own and operate Intermediate Care Facilities for Developmentally Disabled Adults. Habilitation Inc. offers an Adult Development Program for it's clients which includes a Supported Work Program to provide clients with real work situations. Their clients have been volunteering to prepare our newsletter for mailing. Thanks!

The experience in Washington DC working with Justice Fellowship and other invited guests on a platform for Restorative Justice was very stimulating. I hope to share with you some of the results of that effort when they are completed.

Shalom

Ron Claassen, Program Director

2529 Willow Avenue • Clovis, CA 93612
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