



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
November 1988

"Let your needs be known so those who are supportive can respond to the needs." This is what I have been told several times this last month.

VORP has had more expenses than income this year by approximately \$2,000. We have trimmed expenses as much as possible. We have held our expenses to less than what was budgeted by more than \$5,000. To meet our budget by the end of the year we will need to receive in donations in the next two months, \$13,000.00. Together with your regular donations if we receive a few \$1,000, \$500, and \$100 contributions we will make it.

This fall we have trained more than 30 new volunteers already and still have two scheduled trainings to complete. When the need became clear for more volunteers, people responded. We pray that by making the need clear regarding our finances that people will respond as they did to the need for more volunteers. Financial statements are available on request.

Meeting our budget will allow VORP to continue and expand the case load to introduce the Spirit of peace and reconciliation to more people affected by crime. We have been invited by Criminal Justice Officials to expand to more than double our present case load.

It is exciting to think that even at our present level every day of the year a story is happening that is similar to the ones we share each month. Our story this month is from Duane Ruth-Heffelbower. Duane is a pastor and an attorney. He was formerly a member of our board of directors and wrote our applications for incorporation and tax exemption. Duane left his law practice in 1985 to attend seminary. Together with Clare Ann, his wife, they are planting a new church in Clovis, Peace Community Church - Mennonite. Duane changed the names and some of the details in our story so that the identities of the participants are protected.

The VORP process affects both offender and victim in ways we sometimes don't think about. Even in these cases where the offender has clearly and unequivocally done something wrong, those of us who are relatively fortunate in life can have our categories challenged. Juan (not his real name) was caught driving a stolen car. There was no question about his knowing the car was stolen. When I discussed restitution with him, he was completely at a loss. Because of his immigration status most jobs were closed to him and as a student in continuation school had few skills to offer. His self esteem was rock bottom. He had nothing, and no prospects for changing that. When I asked how he would come up with the \$150 restitution, he said: "I'd have to steal it." From that less than auspicious beginning we went into the joint meeting with the owners of the car he had been driving.

The owners did have a substantial loss from personal property in the car at the time it was stolen, but it wasn't Juan who originally stole the car or disposed of the property. A friend had told him there was a stolen car he could use, and he did so. The owners didn't feel right asking Juan to pay for the missing property, but felt something had to be done to make his use of the car more right. The owners had many questions about how the car was used, how young people went about stealing cars, what measures they could take to protect the car, and also told how the theft had affected them. This was the first nice car the owners had ever owned. They talked about how it feels to work for something and have it taken away.

Juan wanted to do whatever was right, but had no suggestions for how he could make up for having driven the car without permission, let alone pay for the lost property. The owners had several ideas, and

discussed them with Juan until they agreed on what would work best in the situation. Juan agreed to help one of the owners pack up her office in preparation for moving, agreeing to four hours work in that way. He also agreed to accompany the other owner to work for six hours at the Salvation Army food distribution during Christmas week. In this way he will work with each of the owners for a significant period. The owners want Juan to have some options, and to work his way out of a situation where the only possibilities he sees for himself involve criminal activity. As we were leaving the meeting Juan said to the owners: "I'm sorry about your car." One of the owners responded: "It's ok, Juan, now." I spoke to Juan after the meeting and asked him how he felt about it. "This is the way it ought to be," he said. "I can do something to make it right."

Thanks Duane! The first part of the agreement was completed on schedule.

The VORP idea is spreading. Nov 16 will be a big day for VORP in California. People from at least eight counties will gather to meet each other for the first time. In addition to sharing experiences, both problems and successes, we will have the special opportunity to have Howard Zehr with us. He is often referred to as the founder of VORP. He provided much of the initial vision and organizational material to help launch the VORP movement. He recently consulted with several groups in England who were implementing a VORP type program. He will be addressing the group on two main topics: The State of VORP and The Role of the Church in VORP.

Organization for this California VORP Gathering and consultation time with many of these programs has been made possible by grants from Kings View Corporation and Mennonite Central Committee-West Coast.

The continuation and expansion of VORP depends on you who understand and support the biblical vision of Justice -- "making things right." Along with your supportive prayers and your encouragement, your financial support is needed now!!

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director

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