



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
December 1988

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST,
AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL AMONG ALL PEOPLE."
Lk 2:14

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
.... "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
But I say to you, Love your enemies..." Matt 5: 38,43f

We enjoy the message of peace (shalom) at this season and often ignore the invitation to pursue peace among us by being willing to be committed to an unconditionally constructive strategy in all of our relationships; with God, with friends, with neighbors, with family, with our environment, and even with our enemies. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Matt 5: 9

VORP volunteers pursue peace by voluntarily placing themselves in the midst of conflict caused by crime and inviting victim and offender to consider what justice and peace might mean for them. Peacemakers take injustice and violations seriously and invite those affected to consider how they might responsibly work together at "making things right." Many victims and offenders respond to that invitation and join in pursuing peace.

Ken Janzen, a member of the Butler Ave Mennonite Brethren Church, is a peacemaker. He gives up personal time to work as a volunteer VORP mediator. He agreed to share a case with us. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

I was deeply touched by this case because it showed me the courage of refugees and that the victim is not always the only victim.

The offender, Koh, allegedly went into a neighbor's apartment under the pretense of using the restroom and took over \$2,000 worth of jewelry from the neighbor's purse. A little more than \$1,000 worth of jewelry is still unaccounted for. Outside of the high dollar amount needed for full restitution this sounded like an open and shut case. Such was not the case.

Without the allegation of theft Koh's life was already complicated. Koh is a 17 year old female refugee from Laos and living in America with step-parents while her real parents remain in Laos. She explained that the living conditions have been very difficult. She shared that she dropped out of high school to have her two children to create a "family" of her own. She expressed her pain of not belonging to anyone. Now her children meet that need. After her children are old enough to go to school she plans to return to school and get a job. In relating these life circumstances to me she seemed encouraged to have someone take such interest in her life. She paused several times because of the pain she felt while sharing her story.

Koh denied taking the jewelry and maintained that in order for her to perform such an act, she would have had to leave her older daughter unattended, which, as she explained, in her culture, would be unacceptable under any circumstances. Even so, she agreed to meet with the victim and try to make restitution. When asked why she was willing to meet with the victim when she maintained she didn't take the jewelry, she said in tears, that nobody believed her side of the story and that the authorities have the final word and she had to obey. Maybe she was lying about taking the jewelry. I don't know. Somehow, in her openness, I felt not only her pain but also her courage to find a way to make the best of a very difficult life.

My first meeting with the victim was in deep contrast to my visit with the offender. The victim was also Laotian. During my first visit her numerous female relatives were butchering ducks in preparation for a birthday celebration for her daughter. She spoke no English so we used an interpreter, a former Laotian Air Force pilot, who was disabled in the Vietnam War. I was

cordially welcomed, invited to sit in the seemingly only chair in the apartment and served an ice cold Coke. With the excited chatter of the working women in the adjoining room and more family members entering the room, we settled down to hearing Kai's story of the theft. As she explained her side of the story she expressed her own hurt from the loss and the violation of losing something very important to her. Jewelry not only meant something of sentimental value but also jewelry meant an investment, like a savings account for them. It was their only and most valued possession. When it came to discussing restitution Kai said that she wanted full restitution and agreed to a meeting with the offender.

Our restitution meeting was held at a McDonald's restaurant. Everyone was dressed up for the occasion. Koh, holding her small infant and her step-father present, appeared determined to put this matter to a close. Kai, with her interpreter beside her and her husband and children near by, appeared uneasy facing her offender but also ready to put the case to rest. Koh, when asked to express her feelings, told Kai that she wanted to make restitution, even though she didn't steal the jewelry, so that Kai would no longer have bad feelings towards her. To do that, Koh agreed to pay back the full amount in monthly payments for the next twenty-two months. I could see the smile of relief on Kai's face and the sincerity on Koh's face and felt like a slow but determined healing process was set in motion. The courage and determination of these people with refugee status gave to me a deep feeling that God's work is possible in the most difficult of situations. I have learned, again, from the VORP process.

Thanks Ken! (The offender's payments are on schedule.)

The next training for volunteer mediators is scheduled for January 24 and 31 from 6-10pm each evening. To register please call Shannon or Gretchen at 291-1120.

Many of you responded to the concern and need we expressed last month related to the fact that we were behind in our finances. We received enough to cover November's expenses and about half of the deficit. Thanks!

One way to pursue peace is to financially support efforts that move in that direction. It appears to me that the only thing keeping VORP from serving twice as many victims and offenders next year is the finances. We have been asked by Criminal Justice Officials to work with as many as four times our current case load. Volunteer mediators respond as the need is made clear. An increase in financial support would allow us to train and support more volunteers and manage an increased caseload. If you want to pursue peace, here is an opportunity! VORP depends entirely on your contributions. VORP is a non-profit tax-exempt corporation.

On behalf of our Board of Directors - Richard Unruh, Deborah Ohanesian, Russell Templeton, Mark Hill, D.H. Mapson, Steve Nilmeier, Margaret Hudson, Ross Becker (Tulare County) and Stan Isaac (Tulare County) and staff (all Christian Service Volunteers), Gretchen Schmidt, Shannon Jost, Mark Allen (1/2 time), and Jerry Reimer (Tulare County - 1/2 time) I wish you a blessed and meaningful Christmas Season.

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director

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