



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
February 1989

You are invited to our Fresno County VORP Gathering. The purpose of this evening will be to celebrate the work of Victim Offender Reconciliation. Your presence is important. Since volunteers are trained in small groups, contributions are generally sent through the mail, and victims and offenders meet with mediators in small meetings; this is a special occasion for us to come together to see each other and to encourage each other. Judge Caeton, Fresno County Superior Court Judge and Presiding Juvenile Judge will be speaking on the value of VORP in our community. Please write "VORP Gathering" in your calendar now for the evening of April 27. Time, place, and other details will be included in next month's newsletter.

The real story of VORP lies in the individual and corporate experiences of victim, offender, and mediator. The story this month is shared by Allen Guenther. He has been mediating cases for 3 years. He is a member of the Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church and a professor at the Mennonite Brethren Seminary. Names and some details have been changed to protect the identities of the victims and offenders.

"On a Dare and a Whim"

"I dare you. I dare you to break that door down."

Which thirteen year old wouldn't be challenged by such a statement, particularly if he was trying to match his friends.

The house was empty. The door gave way easily. Once inside the group of about six got some chairs from the home of one of them and sat around in the empty house relishing their achievement.

Paul and his friends made their way home. Still flush with victory they spotted an unlocked door on a car parked in a driveway. They opened the door and ripped out the tape deck. Tapes, deck and camera were taken to another friend's house. That friend refused to let them store the goods in his home. Where do you stash stolen goods? The empty house.

That evening the real estate agent came to show the home. The friends who issued the challenge came forward with the names--Paul and Robert did it. Meanwhile, one of the parents came forward and claimed the family's chairs. (I wondered why their child was not also charged? But my task at this point is to bring healing where possible.)

Paul accepted responsibility for what happened. No, he hadn't personally ripped out the tape deck--he had stood guard. He had broken down the door, but had not ripped down the drapes nor torn off the screens on the windows in the back of the house, nor left the puppy in the house. Yes, he and his mother were willing to meet with the victims. They needed assurance that it would be safe.

The meeting with the owner of the car took place in our home. The young couple asked some hard questions. The husband was blunt: "If you have a criminal record you can't get into the service. Do you realize how many job opportunities will be closed to you just because of a criminal record? Why did you pick on our car? What had you intended to do with the goods?"

It soon became clear that the whole episode was a response to a dare and a whim, not a personal attack. Gradually the tone mellowed. It became conversation. We proceeded to discuss restitution. The young husband was handy with tools and offered to install the new tape deck himself--that eliminated the service charge. The camera was returned

when the real estate agent found it in the back yard. The amount was fair; the negotiations, friendly; the handshakes vigorous.

And the real estate agent? She paid the costs of the repair herself so that she could show the home. In our meeting at a restaurant her grandmotherly concern for Paul became evident. Paul and his mother relaxed. He accepted responsibility and agreed to pay his share of her loss. I was also asked to share my concern and my motivation for this work of reconciliation. (VORP permits me a new way to express the very heart of the gospel, which is God's concern for reconciliation at every level of our existence.)

How about Robert? His mother refused to meet. "We couldn't face people to whom we have done something like this. But we are willing to pay for our part of the damages." Since participation in the VORP process is voluntary we didn't meet. How sad!

Thanks Allen!

We received 60 referrals in January. If that rate would continue for the year we would be looking at 720 referrals in 1989 compared to 476 last year. That would be a major increase. In order to handle this increase we would need to have a comparable increase in volunteer mediators and financial contributions to enable us to train and support the additional mediators and increased case management.

It seems reasonable to think that this increase could happen. We have 400 churches in Fresno. It wouldn't take very many volunteers per church. And if half of those who receive this newsletter would give \$10 per month we could easily handle the increase.

Unless a substantial number of mediators and new financial contributors decide they want to be partners in making the increase possible, we will soon have to begin returning cases. It seems a shame when we know the potential healing that can happen and most likely won't if we return it.

VORP Mediator Training: The next training is scheduled for March 30 and April 6. There is no charge for the training. There is often some apprehension about whether "I am suited or capable of handling this type of situation." If your interest is high, come to the training. It will become clear to you in the training if this is a good fit for you. The time for the training each evening is from 6pm to 10pm. We work hard and you will learn skills that will be beneficial in all of your relationships. **BRING A FRIEND!** Call Shannon or Gretchen at 291-1120 to register.

Now is a good time to pledge your financial support. Regular small monthly contributions from many of you make a stable and secure base of support. Your contributions are tax deductible. If you want to see our financial statement you are welcome.

The opportunity is available for the churches to have a significant positive involvement in helping work at a major community problem.

Shalom

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