



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
September 1989

The 2nd Annual California VORP Gathering will be meeting Oct 5 in Fresno. All VORP program leaders and others interested in VORP are invited. The registration fee is \$10 and scholarships are available. If you are interested, you are welcome. Call Shannon at 291-1120 for details. Dan Van Ness, President of Justice Fellowship (Sister organization to Prison Fellowship - both associated with Chuck Colson), will be our guest speaker. Dan is a strong advocate of VORP as one of the ways of moving the Theory of Restorative Justice into practice.

Dan will also be speaking twice on Oct 4. At 8:00am in the College Community Mennonite Brethren Church fellowship hall he will be speaking to pastors and others interested from the church community. Coffee and rolls will be served. A no-host lunch is being co-sponsored by VORP and the Fresno Human Relations Commission. The invited group will be Fresno's leaders responsible for our Criminal Justice System. The focus in both meetings will be Restorative Justice (Crime Harms - Justice Restores).

We will also be traveling to Vacaville to introduce Dan to VORG, Victim Offender Reconciliation Group, which is a group of inmates meeting to sensitize themselves to the impact of their crimes on victims and to do constructive acts working at reconciliation. On Sept 12 I will be speaking/working with them on cooperative ways of resolving disputes. On Oct 3 Dan will be speaking to them on the topic of Restorative Justice (Crime Harms - Justice Restores).

David Janzen VORP volunteer mediator from Bethany Mennonite Brethren Church and a computer programmer, is sharing a recent VORP experience with us which illustrates restorative justice. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

There is a healing process that takes place over the course of a meeting between victim and offender that, as the saying goes, must be seen to be appreciated.

When I first met with Richard, he seemed anything but excited at the thought of meeting with the boys who, 3 weeks earlier, had sent rocks through the window at the rear of his house. All he wanted was his \$80 in the mail and, hopefully, never again see the kids who had done this to him and his wife. There was a part of me that wanted to describe the good things that happen when victims meet face-to-face with offenders. A part of me also knew that he probably would not want to hear that at the present moment. I asked him if he would at least be willing to let the families drop off their respective shares of the \$80 in person. He thought that would be fine.

In talking with both Steven and Robert (and their families), the one thing both had in common was that they were quite apprehensive about meeting Richard. Both knew he was quite upset about what had happened, and both thought it best if I just delivered the checks to Richard myself. To walk the two blocks back to Richard's place with checks in hand, would have seemed easy enough. Richard would have been compensated for the damage to his house and the whole matter would be finished.

But such a solution could hardly be called reconciliation. They agreed to walk over to Richard's with me the next day and deliver the checks in person.

I think that many times the VORP mediator has only to get the people together in order for the reconciliation process to happen. What happened, and quite spontaneously, was the 9 of us sitting down in the living room, and both victim and offenders sharing their feelings about what had happened. Richard began by expressing how scared he and his wife had been when the rocks came crashing through their window. He told about how he was

still scared at the thought of it happening again. It was obvious that the two boys had no idea that what they had done had caused so much anguish. Together, they both told Richard how sorry they were and most importantly, that it would not happen again. Richard said he admired the families, and in particular the two boys, for coming over and speaking to him. Soon the conversation drifted into what the boys were doing in school, and how much Richard and his wife enjoyed golf. What might have been just 2 checks in the mail, or a brief meeting at the door, became a 1/2 hour visit in Richard's house and one in which things were truly "made right." All involved said how glad they were to have met face-to-face, and that they felt the whole thing was really behind them now!

Thanks David!

(Crime Harms - Justice Restores)

Victims and offenders need your help!! But we have had to temporarily stop accepting new cases because of a heavy backlog and not enough volunteer mediators to meet the need. How sad! The church has an opportunity to share the good news of reconciliation and restoration with those who are harmed by crime. Please spread the word. If there is a group of 15 or more at your church who would like to be trained, we can arrange a training at your church. Our next regularly scheduled training is Sept 14 and 21 and there will be another one late next month. Call Shannon or Elaine or Rudy for details.

A friend recently said, "thanks for the newsletters and especially the stories. We're glad to be part of the VORP effort. We give \$1 a day." It was fun for me to experience his joy at being able to be part of VORP in this way. We are rejoicing in that all expenses were covered in August. There wasn't much to spare but we made it. Thanks!!

We have enlarged our staff because if we are going to grow to meet the need, we will need more staff to support the growing number of volunteer mediators that we trust will be forthcoming. This also means that we need more friends that can joyfully give \$1 a day or whatever suits you.

Gretchen Schmidt is leaving us and we are sad to see her leave and glad to have had the chance to have her be such a vital part of VORP. She extended a one year commitment into a two year commitment and that is over. This month out of the kindness of her heart she is helping us train our new staff and finish up some of the things she started and didn't have time to finish.

Elaine Enns arrived during the last week in August. She has come to us from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Rudy Dyck has been in Fresno for a year working with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Fresno and now will be working with VORP. Rudy is from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Both Elaine and Rudy are serving as volunteers through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program. We thank God for their willingness to serve.

Deborah Ohanesian (Presbyterian) adopted a baby and due to time commitments has resigned from the board. Dianna Fain (Peoples Church) and Denise Jackson (Catholic) have recently joined our board.

Please join us Sept 19 at the Riverview Shelter at Woodward Park from 6:30 to 9:30 for a picnic recognizing both staff and board transitions. Bring your own hamburger table service, and a salad or dessert. Help us welcome our newcomers and say goodbye and thank you to those who have faithfully served.

Shalom
Ron Claassen

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