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## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. NEWS  
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"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST,  
AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL AMONG ALL PEOPLE"  
Lk 2:14

This vision, that the way of Jesus leads in the direction of peace on earth and good will among all people, is the foundation of VORP.

In Gen 4:23,24 Lamech brags, "I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-seven fold." A common response to an injustice is to strike out in revenge or punishment with a desire to hurt them more than I was hurt. We may feel like doing this occasionally and especially when I am the victim of a crime.

Some of those interested in Jesus' way thought sure there must come a time when we abandon this idea of restorative justice. They said, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" "Jesus said, I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven (seventy-seven times)." Jesus, knowing the scripture well, used this opportunity to reverse the desire for revenge and convert that energy into pursuing restoration.

VORP invites victims and offenders to consider a forgiveness process rather than revenge and punishment. It doesn't mean that we pretend the injustice didn't happen. Rather it invites them into a process where the injustice can be discussed and recognized, agreements can be made to make things as right as possible now, and arrangements can be made (with accountability built in) to do things different in the future.

Christmas is a time to celebrate peace on earth and goodwill among all people.

Each time a crime episode ends with the victim and offender moving in a direction of caring rather than increasing anger or fear, it is a cause for celebration. This is happening every day in Fresno County. Below is an interview with a victim and offender. The mediator was Sharon Martin and the interviewer was Shannon Jost.

The victim was a university professor and the offender was a 14 year old boy. He and a friend were skateboarding, knew of this place where they could get this stereo, broke in and took it. It was about a year later when he was caught and worked through the VORP process. Restitution was completed as agreed. The offender is now 16 years old.

**Shannon:** When the VORP Mediator, Sharon, came and visited with you and explained the program, what did you think of the VORP process?

**Offender:** "My first impression was, I don't want to meet him. I was nervous, because meeting the guy you stole the stereo off of, that's pushing it! I was pretty scared."

**Victim:** "Well, it was kind of a shock and surprise. I had never experienced anything like it before so I didn't know what to expect or what to think, but it sounded like a good idea."

**Shannon:** Did you explain to the victim in your own words what happened?

**Offender:** "Yea, I explained how we got into his office and everything. He was pretty upset."

**Shannon:** What did it feel like to hear the offender describe what he did? What was the atmosphere of the meeting?

**Victim:** "It was interesting. It was amazing to me to hear first hand from someone who had been involved in something like this. They were bored so they stole a stereo." "Naturally we're not dealing with first degree murder, and he was a young man and his father was there. It wasn't too tense, it was sort of "business like" and it was fine."

**Shannon:** Do you think the restitution was fair?

**Offender:** "It was vandalized by my friend so we both paid \$50 to replace it. Yea, I was just as much a part of it as my friend."

**Victim:** "Sure. It was nice to have the money, but the main thing was that I hope it was helpful to the kid to pay and that the whole process (of meeting with me, paying, etc.) might have something to do with straightening him out a little bit."

**Shannon:** Do you think going through VORP has made a difference for you in how you look at the possibility of this happening again?

**Offender:** "It really gives me the perspective of how it affected the victim. Really, before I ever think of doing something like that again I think I would think of putting myself in the victim's place. 'How would that person feel?' Without VORP its more like 'can I do this without getting caught'."

**Shannon:** Any further comments about VORP?

**Victim:** "It seems like its really set up well.. I hope you all can continue to do it. Its great!"

**Shannon:** What was it like from a parent's perspective?

**Dad of Offender:** "He did his work detail with probation over a period of three months. Plus he had to write a paper on what he did. And he had to meet the man he stole from. I think its good he had to do that. I'm glad they have a program like this VORP. Its a good form of 'punishment' plus at the same time teaching him a lesson. We are very fortunate it was handled this way. I'm very happy with the program. He's learned what type of friends to run around with and that there are other ways of having fun other than stealing things. He's with a really nice crowd of guys now."

**Former Offender:** Yea, I'm not like that anymore.

Thanks to our former victim, former offender, Sharon (VORP mediator), and Shannon!

Unfortunately, many victims and offenders aren't invited to consider the forgiveness process because there aren't enough volunteers to handle all of the appropriate cases. It wouldn't take more than one volunteer per month per church. The next VORP training is scheduled for January 9 and 16. Our new policy is that anyone is invited to the training. It is free for those who work with at least three cases. If you want the training and decide not to work with cases, we are requesting a \$15 donation to help cover the training and materials costs.

One way to pursue "peace on earth, good will among all people" is to financially support efforts that move in that direction. VORP depends entirely on your contributions. VORP is a non-profit tax-exempt corporation. Financial statements are available on request. As you are deciding on how to distribute your funds this end of year and Christmas season, please consider VORP. 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 and goodwill among all people, here is an opportunity!!

On behalf of our Board of Directors - Russell Templeton, Margaret Hudson, Richard Unruh, Diana Fain, Mark Hill, Denise Jackson, DH Mapson, Fresno VORP Staff: Shannon Jost (Aurora, Nebraska), Rudy Dyck (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Elaine Enns (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan), and Tulare County VORP Program Manager, Bill Jost, I wish you a blessed and meaningful Christmas Season!!

Shalom  
Ron Claassen, Program Director

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