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## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. NEWS  
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Last month we looked at the preparation necessary before bringing people together. A commitment on the part of each individual to be constructive (agape - love) is needed from each individual. The heart of the VORP process is working at "making things as right as possible" or in religious language we call this the forgiveness process.

There are three parts that we focus on in this process:

1) Recognizing the injustice - The offense is discussed, what did the offender do and how did the victim experience it. Facts and feelings are both important here. Questions and answers are also important. In religious language we call this confession.

2) Restoring the equity as much as possible - What can the offender do to "make things as right as possible now" recognizing that there is no way to not do the offense that already happened and also recognizing that in some sense this is always symbolic. Restitution is an act of restoration. Christians believe that accepting the work of Jesus takes the place of paying some form of restitution in their relationship with God.

3) Making clear agreements for the future - It is very important to the victim to know if the offender intends to "do it again". Or, how are they going to relate in the future. They may not have known each other before or they may have a long relationship, but in either case there need to be agreements for the future. In religious language we call this repentance which means turning to do things differently in the future. These can't be "cheap" agreements but ones that are followed up and carried out.

When there is agreement on both sides that all of these parts have been completed satisfactorily, a transformation has taken place. People feel different about each other than before. As agreements are kept, trust grows.

If you have a conflict with someone, try this process. Prepare with a resolve to be constructive and invite them to join you (or have someone help you) in working at the three steps above. If there is a backlog of injustices, you may have to each be in the victim and offender roles several times. God's process for reconciliation works!!

Our story this month is from Rudy Dyck. Rudy works with VORP through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program. His home church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada is providing part of his support. On the part of the Fresno community we express our appreciation. Rudy works both with case work and follow-up of agreements. By reminding offenders of their agreements, encouraging them, and in some cases helping them through the barriers, last year offenders paid approximately 94% of their agreements. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

Eric is a 15 year old who got caught riding in a stolen vehicle. The car owned by Jan was recovered but had suffered \$5,500.00 damage by the time she got it back. Eric was the only offender who admitted his part in the offense. He was the only one referred to us at this point.

When I met with Eric, he stated how he had been caught in the car but that the car was actually stolen two days before by someone who used it to go to a lake for a party. Over 15 people had been involved in the use of the vehicle.

I then met with Jan who was anxious for VORP to get involved. She explained her displeasure with the response of the police in locating the other offenders. She explained how her insurance was in the process of being transferred from her father to her at the time of the incident. She was in tears but hopeful that VORP might be able to help at least some.

At the joint meeting Eric was supported by his parent and Jan by a boyfriend. Eric started by sharing how he was involved in the theft and that he felt he wasn't responsible for the total amount of the damage that occurred but that he did feel he owed her something. Jan was glad that Eric was willing to meet but was still disappointed that the one she was meeting with was not the one who had been responsible for much of the damage. She was going to have to pay for most of the damage unless she could find the others involved.

The meeting was very emotional at times and Jan was in tears throughout most of it. Eric could see how much this all impacted her and didn't feel good about what had happened at all. We met for an hour and a half and by the end of the meeting an agreement was signed. They agreed that Eric would pay \$400.00 to Jan as well as assist her in finding the others involved. Eric had a good lead on a job and Jan's friend said if things didn't work out he could get him a job landscaping with a friend of his.

Eric expressed his sympathy to Jan several times. He assured her that he would not be involved in such a crime again involving her car or any other for that matter. They even exchanged phone numbers at the end (with the consent of parent and boyfriend) so that they could be in touch regarding information on the other guys involved.

This story might seem to you like one that came out of a story book, but I hear of ones like this all the time. As one of our VORP Volunteer Mediators put it "if you really want to see the work of God first hand even in today's society, just do a VORP case."

Thanks Rudy!

There are two factors that will allow more victims and offenders to experience Restorative Justice:

**Volunteer Mediators:** There is a need for more because we can't nearly handle all of the appropriate cases at this time. The next training is April 23 and 30. The training includes conflict management and mediation skills necessary for peacemaking in many settings (families, school, work, church) in addition to VORP. Training is free for those who work with VORP cases and \$15 for those who are just interested in the training for other settings. Please consider being trained and bring a friend. We encourage working in pairs. Call Shannon or Elaine to register.

**Financial Donations:** The cost of operating the VORP program for one year and working with approximately 500 case referrals is less than incarcerating two individuals for a year. Restorative Justice is efficient and effective. Until our Criminal Justice System becomes a Restorative Justice System with concern for both the victim and the offender and how both might be restored, your contribution will be needed. \$5 per month or \$60 per year from each person receiving this newsletter would allow VORP to handle more cases and wouldn't put a large financial burden on anyone. Please consider making your contribution this month.

Shalom

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