

Is this forgiveness? An offender says: "Please forgive me." What the offender is thinking is: "Now that I have said the magic words the subject is closed. Don't bug me about it any more. In fact, its unfair for you to talk about it any more." And the victim says: "I forgive you." What the victim is thinking is: "I would never do such a disgraceful thing. I will not lower myself to the level of talking to an animal who would do such a thing. I never want to see or think about you again."

Is this forgiveness? An offender recognizes the violation by describing what happened and recognizing it was wrong. The victim describes the very negative experience of the event and the negative impact and feelings since then. The offender recognizes the experience of the victim. They talk about making things right between them. They agree that what the victim really wants to make things right is that the offender had not done it in the first place so that in some sense whatever is done now is symbolic. Given this understanding they agree on some things that can be done now to restore the balance and they do this in part by agreeing that it won't happen again in the future. Finally they agree to live according to the new agreements and accept the others good intentions and welcome each other again as fellow citizens.

VORP Mediators facilitate the forgiveness process, a biblical peacemaking model, described in the second paragraph with victims and offenders who have indicated their interest in restorative justice, making things right between them.

First VORP Case A Positive Experience for Volunteers

VORP Mediators, Andrew and Julie Hershey-Bergen, agreed to describe a case that they worked with. They are both students at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

Our first VORP case certainly was a positive experience for us and it also appeared to be that way for both the victim and offender.

The case involved a 17 year old male first time offender, we will call him Jesse, who had stolen some beer from a convenience store. Contacting him was easy and we met to hear his story. He told us that he had stolen the beer on an impulse. Jesse went into the store to look at a magazine and while there noticed that the clerk was paying little attention to him. He quickly grabbed some beer and ran out to find a police officer waiting for him. As Jesse told his story, he was quiet and made little eye contact. He clearly was ashamed of what he had done and expressed his desire was to make things right (even to "go the second mile"). He was

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willing to participate fully and cooperate in the reconciliation process.

The most difficult step in the case was contacting and arranging to meet the victim, Kelly, who was the franchise owner of the store. After many attempts, we were finally able to meet. Kelly seemed unwilling to participate in the VORP process on first impression. He was frustrated at the volume of beer thefts that he had experienced in his store and he expressed that he did not feel the joint meeting with Jesse would be worth his time and effort. When we explained to him that Jesse had volunteered to go through with the

Volunteers Recognized at VORP Gathering

At our Sixth Annual VORP Gathering we heard the moving experience of a victim of car theft who met with the offender in 1988 and last month received his final payment. We heard a thought provoking message from Dr. David Augsburg, professor of Pastoral Care at Fuller Theological Seminary, on the desperate need for the church to be offering to victims and offenders a forgiveness process as an integral part of our response to crime. We ate from a delicious assortment of hot dishes, salads, and desserts. And for the first time, we recognized some of our long term mediators and all board members with our VORP MUG. The evening was rich with warm, spiritual support.

VORP process, Kelly's approach changed. This information made all the difference and he was ready to work toward reconciliation.

A joint meeting was set up. Jesse started by explaining what happened and why he decided to take the beer without paying. Kelly listened in a calm manner and followed by giving his side of the story. He was very clear in describing the loss that the beer runs cause and how it makes the cashiers feel. He also shared some of his own background in regards to brushes with the law. A sense of understanding seemed to be developing between the two. Kelly wanted the assurance that Jesse would never steal anything again and that he would tell his friends that it is not worth the trouble to steal.

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A contract was drawn up and Jesse agreed to pay \$15.00 for the stolen beer and he promised to never do anything like this again. Perhaps the most exciting

time came at the end of the meeting after the contract had been signed. As the men shook hands, Kelly invited Jesse back into his store whenever he wanted as long as he observed the rules. Jesse responded by thanking Kelly for his understanding.

It was wonderful to witness this reconciliation and to be a part of restoring justice in our world.

Thanks Julie and Andrew!

We encourage VORP mediators to work in teams.

VORP Exists Because of You!

There continue to be many more appropriate cases to work with than we have mediators. Training sessions to prepare volunteer mediators are offered at least quarterly. The training will prepare you to facilitate the forgiveness process described above. You can also arrange for a special training in your church. For details call Beth or Elaine at 291-1120.

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Next year at our Annual Gathering, all volunteer mediators who work with four or more cases will be recognized with a VORP Mug.

VORP happens because there is a structure and people to facilitate it. VORP staff facilitate volunteer VORP Mediators who work with about 400 cases per year. The cost to provide this service is approximately the same as it is to incarcerate one person for 1 1/2 years. Your contribution of \$10 to \$20 per month together with your prayers of support for our mediators, victims, and offenders means a lot to VORP. Please don't put it off because VORP relies entirely on your contributions.

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Shalom

Ron Claassen

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