

Forgiveness is Recognizing What Has Been Wrong and Making Things Right

Forgiveness is for resolving hurts, violations, alienation or injustices. But some of us are afraid to use this term because we are afraid it seems weak or because we have experienced situations in which we thought "forgiveness" was abused.

Forgiveness is not excusing and saying its alright for you to hurt me. Forgiveness is not smothering the evidence and refusing to look at it. Forgiveness is not accepting the good and forgetting the bad. Forgiveness is not tolerating the injustice. Forgiveness is not saying, "From my superior moral position I'll forgive you and from this point forward you will always be indebted to me." Forgiveness is not saying, "I forgive you and I don't ever want to see you again." Forgiveness is not saying I'm sorry and meaning, "now that I said I'm sorry we can't talk about it any more."

Forgiveness is the process of recognizing what has been wrong and making things right. In VORP we do this by inviting the offender to tell what they did and how they experienced it, and inviting the victim to tell how they experienced the offense. A critical part of this is listening to and acknowledging what happened and how it hurt. The next step is restoring equity as much as possible. To some extent this is always symbolic because the preference of the victim is that the offense had not happened in the first place. In VORP this usually takes the form of a restitution agreement to pay back the losses either through money payment or sometimes work for the victim or some other agreement they make. Then the final step is making their intentions for a better future clear and building in some accountability. In VORP these three areas of agreement are written and signed. Trust grows when agreements that are made are kept.

A video tape "A Model for Peacemaking" is now available in which I am helped in explaining the forgiveness process by an interesting mime character and colorful graphics. You may preview it by calling the VORP office. It is available for purchase for \$25. All income above cost benefits VORP. It was professionally produced by Howard Zehr and the Mennonite Central Committee Office of Criminal Justice.

First Time Volunteer Shares Successful Case

Our VORP story this month is told by Wes Schmidt who is a member of the College Church of Christ. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

It seemed like something out of the blue for Mr. Davis when I called to ask if I could come over and talk with him and his wife about the grand theft that had taken place at his home. Many of the articles had been returned but there were some articles missing which he valued at \$180.

From our first meeting I felt Mr. Davis was as interested in helping the offenders as he was in receiving restitution. He agreed to meet with both offenders (plus parents) and suggested his home as the meeting place. This of course would hinge on the agreement of the other parties involved. Mr. Davis knew one of the offenders.

The meetings for each individual offender were to take place within the following week. The first offender, Al (age 14) took place within four days after the meeting with the victims. The meeting was with the offender and his mother. We talked about the offense. In talking to Al and his mother at first he held back some information. His mother encouraged him to tell the truth. The VORP meeting was agreed to at Mr. Davis' home in a few days. The meeting with the second offender, Ben age 13 went just as well. Ben, his mother and I discussed the

offense and the consequences of what had happened. Ben was very shy. Again the time and place of the VORP meeting was agreed to. There was a third offender but he was not referred to VORP.

On the evening of the meeting we met as planned. Al and Ben told of their involvement in the theft. Many interesting things emerged that all parties did not know. After discussing and recognizing the offense we went to restitution. A total of \$180 was agreed upon. Al and Ben each signed an agreement

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Conclusion To June Story

The rest of the story from June: The story was about a purse snatched from a car by Tracy and Melissa and the owner of the purse who turned out to be Rachel, a friend of those who took it. Melissa, accompanied by her mother, met with Rachel and her mother and completed the VORP process. All parties in the meeting expressed attitudes of forgiveness and expressions of things having now been made right between them. On the other hand, Tracy and her mother have missed several scheduled meetings. Rachel and her mother are seriously considering pursuing the civil court option. We always grieve when someone is not willing to take responsibility but also remember that VORP is a voluntary process, forgiveness cannot be forced.

to repay Mr. Davis \$60 (\$180 divided by three).

From restitution we moved to the future. This is where Mr. Davis was very helpful in telling of his boyhood and the problems he had faced at the same age as Al and Ben. This was a very good exchange between Mr. Davis, Al and Ben. He asked for a promise that they not become involved in this type of thing again. They promised.

This was my first time as a VORP mediator. With anticipation I am starting my second case.

Thanks Wes!

More Mediators Needed

There are many appropriate cases where the victim and offender are not given the opportunity to make things right between them because there are not yet enough mediators to handle all of the appropriate cases. Our next VORP Mediator Training will be Sept 10 and 12. Call Elaine or Beth to reserve space for you and/or your friends. For those who are interested, undergraduate credit or professional development credit is available through Fresno Pacific College.

You Are Making VORP Possible

VORP relies entirely on your financial contributions. VORP doesn't have financial reserves, so this means that if you are already giving, you are making VORP possible, and if you are not yet giving, you could help VORP expand to invite more victims and offenders to consider making things right between them. Each time you help this happen, you reduce the anger and tension in our world just a little and therefore also reduce the potential for violence just a little. Jesus said, "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

A special thanks to our friends at OASIS, who each month prepare this newsletter for mailing. OASIS provides loving and meaningful day care for older adults.

Shalom

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