

Someone asked me recently if it is really possible for people to have a cooperative resolution to a conflict, one in which each of the parties feels like a winner. They said that it seems to them that one is always the winner and the other the loser. I must agree that using our winner/loser lens (generally assuming "my way" means winner and "your way" means loser) it would appear like there is a winner and a loser in most resolutions. But there is a lens, "our way," where the parties agree to look for a resolution that would be the best possible one for both of them given the circumstances. They search together for one that meets their main concerns. For Christians one of these concerns is that the resolution be consistent with the spirit of Christ as in the story of a conflict resolution in Acts 15. If a resolution to a conflict meets the main concerns of both parties, then it is a good resolution for both rather than a winner/loser situation.

In VORP both parties agree that their purpose for meeting is to work toward making things right between them. It starts by recognizing the injustice and its impact on the victim. This is followed by making agreements about what could be done to restore equity between them (always involves some grace because the victims first choice would be that they would go back and not do the offense) and to clarify their intentions for the future. When all of these steps are completed in good faith by both parties, with the help of a VORP mediator, movement has happened in the direction of restoring both victim and offender. Trust has started to grow and if the agreements are kept, that growth continues.

Young Offender Finds A Caring Friend Through VORP Process

Our story this month is from Linda Mack, an experienced VORP Mediator. The story below did not just happen on its own. It happened because Linda was willing to take her own time to learn the VORP process and integrate it with her personality to provide for the victim and offender in this case a trustworthy person to guide them toward a cooperative and constructive resolution. Without her assistance this experience would have ended being a very negative

Jesse rolled under a parked car and hid there until the police had left...

experience for both and one that would have severely damaged and perhaps ended a significant relationship. Some names and details have been changed to protect the identities of the victim and offender.

Jesse is 14 years old (one of the younger of ten children in his family) and a student in the GATE program at his Jr. High.

Last summer he and a friend wanted to go to Clovis Lakes but didn't have the money to get in. They decided to break into the neighborhood elementary school to find something they could sell. Jesse said that as soon as they got inside the school he told his partner, "This just isn't right. We shouldn't be doing this." They left the school without taking anything and when they saw a police patrol car after them they ran. His friend was caught, but Jesse rolled under a parked car and hid there until the police had left the area. After a sleepless night he called the police and turned himself in.

When I met with Jesse and suggested a meeting with the school principal, he was taken aback. The principal has been one of his favorite teachers. He said, "He's really a good guy who was always fair to me. I'm ashamed to have to tell him about this. I never thought about having to do that." He did agree to the meeting though, as "something that has got to be done."

At the meeting, the principal greeted both Jesse and his mother warmly. Jesse told his story and apologized for what he had done. The principal talked about how he never had enough money to provide all the things that students need at

The Principal told Jesse he was still proud of him.

his school, so it was very disappointing and frustrating to see money spent on fixing windows, cleaning up graffiti, and replacing things that are stolen. And he said its even more frustrating when the offense is committed by one of the students from their school. He told Jesse that he had kept track of him since he had left the school, and that he had felt really proud when he heard that Jesse had been accepted into the GATE program. So, he said, as you can imagine it was really sad and disappointing to hear it was Jesse who was involved in this break-in. He also told him that he had been glad to hear that he had turned himself in because he felt that had taken real courage. He said that with that kind of courage and with the courage it must have taken to face up to his responsibility by participating in this meeting and offering to make things right, he had real hope that he would have the courage to face up to peer pressure in the future. Jesse assured him that

ANNUAL VORP GATHERING COMING SOON

YOU ARE INVITED TO OUR ANNUAL VORP GATHERING!! Please call Mark or Elaine to make your reservations now for March 17, 1992, 6:30pm. Bring a guest to introduce them to VORP! Our guest speaker will be Mr. James Rowland who recently retired after working in corrections for 35 years. His last three positions included Chief Probation Officer for Fresno County, Director of the California Youth Authority, and Director of the California Department of Corrections. Mr. Rowland now adds to his list of titles, VORP Volunteer. Come to our gathering and hear why he thinks VORP is so important and why it is essential for the church (all churches) to be involved.

POTLUCK MEAL

A-M Bring Main Dish and Rolls

N-Z Bring Salad and Dessert

College Community Mennonite Brethren Church - Fellowship Hall

(story continued)

he would pay for the broken window and he would never do anything like this again.

They both agreed to a follow-up meeting at the end of Jesse's probation. The principal told Jesse that he was still proud of him, would always be his friend, would like for him to come back to school from time to time to let him know how things were going, and that he expects to be invited to Jesse's university graduation. As they chatted and warmly said goodbye and the meeting ended, I couldn't help but think how fortunate it was that Jesse was referred to VORP and that he had the courage to meet. He found out that his former teacher/principal really cared about him. They now have a growing friendship which could have been lost.

Mediator Training Scheduled

The next Mediator Training sessions will be March 30 and April 6, May 21 and May 28, Sept 17 and 24, and Nov. 10 and 17.

Training includes learning collaborative leadership skills and how to lead a cooperative resolution process. For those who follow up the training by taking VORP cases there is no charge for the training except the \$7.50 materials fee. For those just wanting the training for use in other areas the fee is \$75. All are welcome.

In addition to the general training events listed above, some churches have requested a special training at their church. If at least 10 people are

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

VORP relies entirely on your contributions!! Thank you for your response to our special appeal in December. We ended the year being able to meet all of our expenses and have about \$1,500 in the bank. Thank you!! VORP offers you an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of many offenders and victims. Your contributions make it possible for Volunteer VORP Mediators to invite victims and offenders to consider responsibility and reconciliation as an alternative to continued suspicion, fear, and hostility. Of the 4,000 potential VORP meetings last year only 300 were invited to participate. The two limiting factors are finances and volunteer mediators. With more financial resources we can find the volunteer mediators. \$20 per month from everyone receiving the newsletter would provide adequate financing to work with all 4,000. You can make a difference.

Shalom

Ron Claassen

planning to follow up the training by taking cases, there will be no charge for the training except the materials fee and as many as 24 may be included.

JOBS NEEDED for kids to pay off their restitution agreement. If you have housework or yardwork to be done, please contact Mark at the VORP office. 291-1120.



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Victim **O**ffender Reconciliation **P**rogram

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