

CHOOSE YOUR SIDE! LET JUSTICE BE DONE!

Choose your side!! Who are you for anyway?! The media coverage surrounding the recent Rodney King verdict and subsequent events in South Central Los Angeles impacted all of us. At one level we have become aware, at another level we have listened to others reflections and suggestions, at another we have likely entered into conversation at home, work, church or somewhere related to the events, and at another level we have our own personal reflections. A predominate paradigm or pattern of thought that is present at all of these levels is the call for us to sort through what we have seen and heard and choose sides. We are called to determine who is at fault so that the wrongdoers can be punished.

This paradigm or pattern of thought is just one of many options. I would like to suggest another. The Bible says that God's intention is for us to live together in Shalom (The kind of peace that results from right relationships between us and with God). Rather than asking who are you for, you might be asking, What have I become aware of that is anti-shalom and what could be done to move in the direction of creating shalom? What could the immediate active participants do and what could I do?

The first pattern is sometimes called Retributive Justice and the second is called Restorative Justice. Howard Zehr's book CHANGING LENSES provides a thorough discussion and contrast of both. I would highly recommend reading it. If you can't find a copy you can order it through our office. Please enclose \$15 with your request.

Restorative Justice At Work Through VORP Volunteer

■ VORP is a Restorative Justice activity. VORP mediators invite (with patience, perseverance, empathy, and purpose) the participants to bring to light the anti-shalom activity so that things can be made right. Our story this month of from Carol Dice, a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Fresno. She said that an important reminder for her while working on this case was Romans 8:28 "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

While in the company of an older cousin, Jose, an 11 year-old, broke windows in a boarded-up house on inner-city property owned by the Central Unified School District. After a series of postponed meetings, in October I met Jose and his mother at his grandmother's home. Jose agreed to meet with a representative of the school district and offered to work a certain amount of hours at a school to make restitution for the school property he had destroyed. He expressed that he might be able to work with the vice-principal of the school he currently attended.

After numerous phone calls to the central district office and consultation with the VORP staff, we decided to meet with Mr. Wright, principal of Jose's school, in December to arrange a meeting to discuss the reconciliation process.

At this time, Jose's family moved to a new apartment across town. After several unsuccessful trips, I contacted Jose's mother and arranged a meeting with Mr. Wright, who fortunately had previous experience

with the VORP program. In January at the joint meeting, they all agreed that Jose could contribute to the school by tutoring in the lower grades during his Spring vacation in March. Jose was pleased to be entrusted with the privilege of being a positive role model to the younger children. His mother was grateful to have Jose occupied in positive activities and supervised during part of his free time. The school also would provide lunch for all the school tutors. I affirmed Jose and his mother for their courage to meet face to face with Mr. Wright and we all signed the agreement form. We had finished the toughest part of this case.

The next step in the reconciliation process occurred in March. Mr. Wright informed me that Jose, after tutoring for two weeks of his vacation had stopped attending school. Subsequent contact with the grandparents revealed that fearing violence in her new neighborhood, Jose's mother had temporarily moved. We arranged a second meeting with Mr. Wright to update the VORP agreement and to decide what to do next.

The second meeting far exceeded expectations. After affirming Jose for completing half of the 36 hours of restitution agreed upon, Mr. Wright telephoned the vice-principal of a school near to Jose's home. Also familiar with the VORP program, the Vice-Principal immediately agreed to supervise the remaining hours of restitution to be completed by Jose. We met with the vice-principal and agreed that the work would be completed during Jose's summer vacation in July. Since the school is within

walking distance of Jose's home, he will assume responsibility for getting himself to and from the school to complete his agreement. This new workplace proved to be positive as Jose would be transferring there next fall. This would help him feel part of the Student Body even before he attends.

Completing this stage of the VORP agreement at this school will also help Jose forge stronger personal relationships with the school officials. Thus, he will be less likely to get lost in the crowd of transfer students newly attending the school.

Finally, when the agreement has been completed, we all agreed to meet together to celebrate the reconciliation process with pizza.

Thanks Carol!! Due to your efforts Jose, his Mother, the Principal and Vice Principal all became active participants in Restorative Justice.

VORP VOLUNTEER MEDIATOR TRAINING SCHEDULED

The next VORP mediator training sessions are Sept 17 & 24, and Nov. 10 & 17. VORP Mediator Training includes instruction and practice in collaborative leadership skills, listening skills, conflict styles, and leading a cooperative process to heal an injustice. The training fee is \$75 or "FREE" for Mediators who take at least three cases. The materials fee for everyone is \$10. Scholarships are available. College Undergraduate or Professional Development Credit is available through Fresno Pacific College. Call Elaine or Mark to make reservations.

VORP RELIES ENTIRELY ON YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

Your contribution makes VORP possible. Each time you contribute you help train a volunteer mediator to make Restorative Justice possible. Please enjoy the stories and know that your contributions make them possible. Another contribution that we need is your prayer support. Please remember the mediators, victims and offenders who are meeting today and throughout this month.

Our Board of Directors is committed to expanding services as contributions and mediators are available. Our current capability is about 400 cases per year, 4,000 cases per year is the need, and your participation will make it possible. It is not an impossible dream.

Shalom

Ron Claassen, Program Director



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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) is a restorative justice program that provides a safe and structured environment for victims, offenders, and mediators to meet and discuss the crime. The program is designed to help victims understand the impact of the crime, express their feelings, and receive answers to their questions. Offenders are given the opportunity to explain their actions, take responsibility, and make amends. Mediators facilitate the process and ensure that all participants are treated with respect and dignity. The program is available to victims and offenders who are willing to participate in the process.

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