

"Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all people."

"For to you is born ... a Savior."

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, good will among all people."

That historic announcement to the shepherds was/is good news. God's intention was to make it clear that reconciliation, not retribution or punishment, was God's preference for dealing with the conflict (definition: when the actions and attitudes of one block or interfere with the goals of the other) between God and each individual. God's intention for the world is that people live in relationship with God and each other, in peace, and not in fear.

Victim Offender Reconciliation is good news. When both are willing to work for Justice, "making things right," reconciliation is experienced as an alternative to deepening alienation and increasing fear. But it rarely happens when it is left to chance. It happens when VORP Mediators, volunteers, give their time to invite victim and offender to consider the idea of trying to "make things right as possible" between them. VORP never suggests ignoring the conflict or acting as if it doesn't matter, rather each is invited to participate in recognizing the injustice and its impact (confession), deciding what is needed to restore equity (atonement/restitution), and agreeing on future intentions that move beyond the offense and prevent its reoccurrence (repentance). When victim and offender participate in this forgiveness process, reconciliation happens. Movement from hostility and fear toward caring and peace are the result. Trust starts building as agreements are made and kept.

Being A Peacemaker Was "A Great Experience" For VORP Volunteer

Our VORP story this month is another demonstration of restoration and reconciliation. It happened because many of you have responded to the invitation of Jesus to be peacemakers. Some have been contributing financially to make it possible to have an organization in place to organize, train, and act as liaison for those who have contributed by becoming mediators. It happened because volunteer VORP Mediator, Ginny Daily, a member of Lord of All Nations Church-Luthern, was willing to place herself in the conflict and invite victim and offenders to work for justice, "making things right." Finally, it happened because the victim and offenders responded to that invitation and allowed the spirit of responsibility and reconciliation to prevail over the desire for avoidance or revenge.

In all the years, and in all of the cases that I've been privileged to handle for VORP, the last one could have had the program written after it and how it should work.

At first the thought of five young juvenile offenders, very poor families, and a restitution amount of \$1,750.00 didn't exactly excite me when Barb called with the case. I don't know if guilt, or challenge, made me accept.

In this case I called the victim first. The victim informed me that her son-in-law handled all of her affairs, and that I would need to contact him, which I did. He was very receptive from the first moments of the conversation. He explained that the loss of the crop of raisins, from the offenders trashing them, would have resulted in a loss of \$6,000.00, but that they were able to salvage most, so that the loss was now \$1,750.00 or \$350 per boy. I told him that I'd be in touch after contacting the offenders, since he was willing to work with VORP.

I then proceeded to contact the offenders and parents, and one elderly grandmother who had custody for two of the boys. One by one they agreed to meet with me, and I set a date for a group meeting of offenders and parents. Since the offenders were young and all from

the same neighborhood, I decided to meet with them as a group. To my delight and surprise, they all arrived and on time. It was a great meeting! After I explained the VORP process, and the amount of loss I had heard from the victim, the parents and boys all said that they were thankful for this opportunity to accept responsibility directly with minimal formal criminal justice system involvement. Everyone thanked me!

I next met with the victim's son-in-law who said he would be willing to meet with the offenders and to work with them on establishing a reasonable restitution plan. Since these boys were from the neighborhood, he knew their financial straits.

After recontacting everyone, a date for our joint meeting was finally set.

Again, it was great! Everyone was there, and on time!

The victim thanked the boys for the letters that they had previously sent him expressing their apology. He also told how he had experienced the incident, and how it had also impacted his wife and elderly mother-in-law.

Each boy then gave their own account of the offense, and how it had been a game that they were playing, not realizing the consequences, especially the impact on the people and amount of the damage. None had meant to hurt anyone, and they didn't have anything against the people.

One by one each told how they were going to pay for their share of the loss. Everything from picking crops to taking care of siblings. It was an emotional time. I could see that their willingness to accept responsibility had touched Mr. Smith (not his real name).

The parents and boys... were thankful for the opportunity to accept responsibility.

Continued on back

My eyes were wet. Mr. Smith whispered to me that he was willing to let the two boys with their grandmother count as one. The grandmother was very thankful. What better demonstration of reconciliation than the forgiveness of a debt owed!

The boys each signed their own contract, and shook hands with Mr. Smith assuring him that better judgment

would be used in the future both in regard to his and other peoples property.

What a great experience for me and them!

Thanks Ginny! (Ginny has been a VORP mediator since 1984.)

"Blessed are the Peacemakers." There are two primary factors limiting how often stories like this happen. One is how many people are willing to be trained and available to work with cases and the other is the ability of the organization to train and support the volunteer mediators.

These stories are not the result of chance.

They happen because people who care and have been trained extend invitations and then create a situation which invites resolution, restoration, and reconciliation. Your next opportunities for training (please tell and/or bring a friend) will be January 12, 19, and 26. Call Barbara or Linda for details. The cost for those planning to be VORP mediators is just \$10.00 for materials. If you just want the training the cost is \$75.

We Appreciate Your Support At This Special Time Of The Year

Christmas is a time of generous gift giving to friends, relatives and those in need. You can give victims and offenders a gift, an invitation and assistance in reconciliation. There is a direct ratio between the amount of your donations and the number of victims and offenders who will be invited to consider reconciliation. VORP relies entirely on your contributions. We entered December \$1,500 behind on our expenses and with no reserve. You can help change that. Please give whatever is appropriate for you. Now is a good time. \$75 trains a mediator. Thanks to you who faithfully support VORP!

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Staff and myself I wish you a Very Meaningful and Happy Christmas Season, one that reflects the spirit of Jesus, the reason for our Celebrations.

Shalom

Ron Claassen, Director

Christmas Wish List

- Computer
- Printer
- Copy Machine



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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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