

*"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 accountability and 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 volunteer Mediators, give their time to invite victim and offender to consider the idea of trying to "make things as 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 is the result. Trust starts building as agreements are made and kept.

Spirit Of Responsibility And Reconciliation Prevail

■ 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 VORP in place to organize, train, and act as liaison for those who contribute by becoming mediators. Finally, it happened because the victim and offender responded to that invitation and allowed the spirit of responsibility and reconciliation to prevail over the desire for avoidance or revenge.

Our story this month and next is actually the same story. This month it will be told from the perspective of the offender and next month from the perspective of the victim as transcribed from a taped interview. They were each interviewed by Barb Toews. The mediator in the case was Linda Olthoff. I have done some editing. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

Offender's Perspective

"See...a friend of mine and I were at a Mall and we had a motorcycle and we were riding around, and we came up with this really stupid idea of driving by somebody and grabbing their purse and taking off. It just happened that the person we decided to drive by was Pauline. It was just a random thing. The guy in the back said if you get close enough, I'll grab it. I drove by and sure enough, he grabbed it, we took off. We left and went to some stores and decided we'd try to go buy some stuff. It ended up that security, didn't think it was the right thing with two guys going in using a lady's check or something. They caught us, actually they caught me and the other guy got away. I'm just 18. I go downtown, they book me in, put me in jail. I spend a week down there. And all that whole time in jail was, like, probably the worst time of my life. So then, I was bailed out and start going through the courts and everything is going pretty smoothly in court I guess, the lawyers saying what's going to be happening. I go in there and it looked like I was about to get sentenced and the Judge asked if anyone had anything to say on this and Pauline stood up and kind of shocked me. She said that I had no clue of what she had went through and that if

there was any way for me to find out what she went through, if there was any program where I could sit down and find out and talk with her, she would like to do that... So the VORP program was mentioned and they said that would be a good idea. So we did that, they gave us an extra 30 days to do the VORP program."

"She was right, I had no clue of what she went through, I found out that it was more than just her purse and money taken. It was also that all her bills hadn't been paid, all her credit went bad because checks didn't have enough money in the bank, and just realizing that it was not just... it was mentally, she was, her life was kind of at a down point to begin with and that just put it down further. She was right I had no clue what she had gone through."

"Before, I knew that she had about \$700-\$800 in cash. I kind of thought this lady is probably more of a wealthier lady. And all I heard is that she wants her money back. It kind of seemed that this lady was a richer class. It was no biggie to her, she wanted her money back but it didn't really affect her. Now I know, she's struggling too, just like everyone else trying to work hard."

The VORP meeting: "I was late, I was working, that was a bad situation. I'd rather be early than having them wait for me..."

I had met Linda first. Kind of got to know her. I didn't really know what would happen, like if you were going to get yelled at, figured you should be yelled at. And you had to figure it was a weird situation where you did something to them and now you're sitting down talking to them and by the end of the day, my mom's giving them a hug. It just went...kind of scary moments but then it was good, real good. It was scary at first but by the time you're done you kind of felt you were friends. Its like, it was good, but really weird."

"She came with a list of like \$898 worth of stuff she had lost which I paid. She said she lost a week's worth of pay, which I agreed, she shouldn't lose anything. She's going to court because of a bad check so, I paid that too so that was alright,

I didn't want her to lose anything. She probably could have gotten more for her troubles but she didn't ask, it was nice of her."

Sentencing: "It was kind of weird as we went into my sentencing. We all sat down together. The court room was packed. It wasn't like "he's offending me" (like the first time in court). Now its kind of like she was helping me instead of trying to, you know, get the worst degree.

She's kind of there on your side for you, kind of weird. I'm sure the attorneys were probably thinking, 'Whoa, what's going on. This is really different.'"

"It happened so quick I don't know what happened first. It was the judge who asked if I had anything to say. I said that

I took responsibility on myself and that it wasn't the other kid, he didn't make me do it, I shouldn't have done it. (The other guy denied involvement.) The judge asked if anybody else had something to say and Pauline went up there and said we had talked and that she really didn't think jail would be helpful. Peoples faces were, kind of, hung open. The DA said, I can go along with that. VORP, and what she said, went a long way with the courts. They changed it from a felony to a misdemeanor. At 18 a felony on my record would have just kind of ruined my life right there."

Summary: "It was good, real good. It was scary at first but by the time you're done, you kind of felt you were friends."

Thank you anonymous, former offender!!!!

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.

Reconciliation stories are not the result of chance.

They happen because many people in conflict will respond to an invitation from people who care and have been trained to create an environment which invites resolution, restoration, and reconciliation. Your next opportunities for training (please tell and/or bring a friend) will be February 1, 8 and 15 (6:30-9:30), March 11 (6:30-9:30) & 12 (8:30-3:30), and May 9, 16, & 23 (6:30-9:30). Call Barbara or Linda for details. The cost for those planning to be VORP mediators is \$15 for materials. If you just want the training the cost is \$75.

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. *Volunteers have worked with over 500 cases this year* and our cash costs have been less than \$40,000 so far. Less than incarcerating 2 offenders for one year. VORP relies entirely on your contributions. **We entered December \$1,700 behind on our expenses and with no reserve.** If you want to see these reconciliation efforts continue and grow, you can do your part by joyfully making a contribution. Please give whatever is appropriate for you. Now is a good time. \$75 trains a new mediator. Thanks to you who faithfully, regularly, joyfully 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

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program