

## IT'S TIME FOR CHURCHES TO PROVIDE MORE VORP LEADERSHIP

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'" and again "you have heard that it was said, 'love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love (agape) your enemies..." Matt. 5. Jesus said that those who follow him will change their paradigm. Instead of putting their efforts into retaliation and punishment, massive effort will be put into creating opportunities and structures to call people to responsibility and repentance (turning). When this happens it leads to forgiveness, accountability, and reconciliation rather than punishment, irresponsibility, and alienation.

We say in our churches that we believe in forgiveness and reconciliation. It is time that we recognize the message of responsibility, forgiveness and reconciliation is relevant in addressing our crime problems. It is time our churches get involved in providing leadership and, alongside our Criminal Justice System, providing an option that the government, which by definition operates from a coercive force perspective, will never be able to do.

Restorative Justice is a paradigm that is consistent with the teachings of Jesus. The Conference on May 12 and 13 is an opportunity to get a better understanding of the role the church has already had in developing this concept as well as to explore the continuing role of the church. The experts will be there.

Every community needs a VORP and I think that the Churches in the community should assume responsibility for this effort. Some say that it is expecting too much for the churches to do this in addition to all of the other things they need to do. But, in Fresno there are approximately 400 churches and if each church just assumed responsibility for one case per month, that would mean that 4,800 cases could be handled per year. In conversations with criminal justice officials we have come up with an estimate that about 4,000 cases per year would probably be appropriate for VORP.

If you have a VORP in your community, please send this newsletter to someone in a community where they don't yet have a VORP. Encourage them to attend the preconference workshop on "How to start a Church Based VORP."

## ASSAULT CASE BETWEEN KIDS HELPS PARENTS RESOLVE THEIR OWN FRUSTRATIONS

■ If stories like the one below were happening every day in every community it would have to make a positive difference. Our story this month is from Sam Kuna, a student at Fresno Pacific College, who has taken the VORP training and supervised mediation experience for College Credit as well as community service. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

The case was about a 15 year old, Ken, who assaulted and robbed a 12 year old, Scott, of \$9.

An appointment was made to meet with Ken and his mother, Susan. At the meeting, Ken gave a very brief account of what happened. Susan had to prompt him here and there to tell the whole story. After explanation on the function of VORP, Ken and Susan said they were agreeable to meet with the victim and the family.

I called Scott but he was not in. I spoke to his mother, Nancy, and she said they would be willing to meet with me. Things seemed to be falling in place. However, at the meeting after Scott told his story and I told them about the VORP process, Scott said that he did not want to meet with Ken. He felt that it would not do any good because there was no guarantee that Ken would change and not do it again. Nancy was upset that Ken was not sent to Juvenile Hall. We reviewed the restorative model. By meeting with Ken they would be placing themselves in a position where they could speak directly to Ken. We discussed that the system also could not guarantee "change" from Ken. Perhaps both Scott's and Nancy's goal could be accomplished, which was to get Ken to guarantee them that he would not do such a thing again. I suggested they not make a decision immediately but that I would call them in a few days.

I kept in touch with Barb (VORP Case Manager) and she assured me that I did the right thing to give them some time. When I called back, Nancy said they wanted to go ahead with the meeting. I made arrangements with Barb to use the VORP office and she said that Linda (VORP Restitution Manager and experienced mediator) would be there at the joint meet-

ing. I called Ken and Susan and confirmed the meeting with them. My excitement was picking up again.

On the morning of the joint meeting, Ken, Susan and Doug (Ken's father) were the first to arrive. Ken was in a pensive mood, sitting quietly with his hands across his chest. Scott and Nancy arrived. Everyone introduced themselves and I proceeded to introduce the purpose and outline of the joint meeting. I was a little nervous but everything seemed to be going as planned until Ken finished his story and Scott questioned the "gaps" in the story. Ken became very defensive and insisted that Scott's allegations were not true.

I asked Scott to summarize what Ken said and then asked him to proceed with his story and then Ken summarized it. I asked the parents if they had something to say and it opened the "floodgates" for Nancy who released a lot of anger and frustration describing the impact the incident had on her family. Ken's parents also expressed frustration and encouraged Ken to understand the extent of the trouble caused. Then Nancy began to share her own struggles from the past. She had accepted responsibility and had proved herself to society and was now very involved in community work. She understood what it meant

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## CRIME


**IS THERE A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE?**

*Can there be a system that holds offenders accountable, teaches responsibility, restores the victim and the offender, and at less cost?*

Attend the 2nd Annual  
**Restorative Justice Ministries Conference**  
May 12-13, 1994  
Registration Fee \$50  
Held at Fresno Pacific College, Fresno, CA  
*Co-sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee & Prison Fellowship Ministries*

**TO START A VORP IN YOUR AREA**  
Attend preconference workshop on Church-based Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP)  
May 10-12, 1994  
Registration Fee: \$300

**Call 1-800-909-VORP**


**Fresno Pacific College**  
CENTER FOR CONFLICT STUDIES AND PEACEMAKING  
1717 South Chestnut Avenue  
Fresno, California 93702

to be put down by society and did not want to do that to Ken. She was concerned about his self-esteem and hoped that he would treat this incident as his "rock bottom" experience so that he could go on and be successful in life. Following this, Ken's father disclosed his struggles also and that he had to prove to society too that he had made a genuine comeback. These self-disclosures turned the sequence of events around.

I asked Ken to summarize and respond to what Nancy had said. After the summary he said that he had not expected Scott's family to be concerned about his feelings or his future. He appreciated that. I then asked both of them to summarize their feelings before and after the meeting. Ken came thinking that he was going to get a lot of scolding from Scott's family, but instead he found them to be concerned about him. Scott came thinking that Ken came from a "bad" family but was surprised to find that Ken's parents were good people.

Finally, Ken apologized to Scott and Nancy. Scott clarified that although he accepted the apology, he could not say that it was alright. Both believed that if they saw each other in the neighborhood they would be able to greet each other instead of fight or avoid each other. Both parties signed the contract. I thanked them for their contributions to the meeting. The two mothers hugged each other and Doug shook Nancy's hand. I was concerned about how Scott would respond and I can't tell you how good I felt when I saw Scott extending his hand to Ken. They all went out talking together.

At one point in the joint meeting I felt a little out of control, but I found that there was strength and resource from both parties that actually helped in the reconciliation process. As the VORP training said, the mediator is a facilitator. The outcome is decided by the cooperation of the two parties.

Thanks Sam! Blessed are all the Peacemakers!!

What is a story like this one worth!! Including all of the costs of VORP; training, office expense, personnel, newsletter, insurance, etc.; the cost per case is approximately \$100 and dropping as we grow. VORP is efficient and effective. VORP relies entirely on your contributions!!!! VORP could grow to handle 4,000 cases per year with your help. If you can afford it, I would suggest \$20 per month.

The next VORP Mediator training events are scheduled for May 9, 16, & 23; July 22 & 23; Sept 8, 15, & 22; Oct 7 & 8; and Nov 15, 22, & 29. The training equips participants to meet separately with victim and offender in preparation and to lead a joint meeting to help them deal with the injustice, decide how to make things as right as possible, and to make commitments for a better future (like Scott and Ken). Participants report that the skills learned are helpful in relationships at home, at church, and at work. Call Barbara or Linda (291-1120) to register.

If your church isn't yet a VORP Sustaining Friend, please call Elaine (251-1549) and arrange for her to discuss how your church can make a positive difference in addressing crime in our community.

Shalom  
Ron Claassen, Director

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