

This Christmas, give your neighbors the gift of restorative justice

Your gifts of \$20, \$50, \$100, or \$500 make these reconciliation stories possible. Please consider giving a special gift this Christmas season to share the Good News and to expand the work of reconciliation and restorative justice.

## Merry Christmas

Clear your calendar for 1995 VORP training

You can become a volunteer VORP mediator. The mediator training will help you learn and use the Peacemaking Model in any setting. The fee is \$20 for those who plan to work with three or more cases and \$100 for those who want the training primarily for use in other settings. The next training sessions are February 3-4 and March 20, 27, and April 3. The training includes 9 class hours, reading, and on-the-job training.

'VORG' brings GOOD NEWS of Peacemaking Model to prison...

## Upon offender's release, meeting offers hope of healing for victim's family

Ron Claassen

"Be not afraid, for behold I bring you GOOD NEWS of great joy which will be for all the people."

This was Jesus' birth announcement.

Jesus is the reason we celebrate Christmas.

The GOOD NEWS (the gospel) is that bad relationships can be turned into good relationships. The GOOD NEWS is that God loves (*agape*) us, meaning that God always wants to be constructive with us, even when we are not yet being constructive in return.

The GOOD NEWS is that God wants to enter a forgiveness process, the process of making things right, with us whenever we are ready. The GOOD NEWS is that forgiveness happens when the injustice is recognized (confession), equity is restored (atonement — a combination of grace and restitution), and intentions are clarified to prevent the injustice in the future (repentance).

And the GOOD NEWS is there is no restitution due in our relationship with God. While restoring the equity (atonement) is usually

some combination of restitution and grace, thanks to Jesus, it is all grace in our relationship with God.

This is also our VORP Peacemaking Model. Inmates at Vacaville State Prison call it GOOD NEWS!

About twice a year, I am invited to visit the Victim Offender Reconciliation Group (VORG) at the state prison in Vacaville. I am asked to present the Peacemaking Model and talk with the group about how it is being applied in a wide variety of situations. The first time I presented the Model, to about 50 inmates — most in for murder and other very serious offenses — I was scared and unsure of how it would be received. But when I finished presenting the Peacemaking Model, the first response was, "this is GOOD NEWS." I hadn't used the term GOOD NEWS in the presentation, but when he said it I thought, how appropriate. This really is the heart of the Gospel.

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## 'Joy-rider' caught in stolen car accepts victim's dinner invitation

Jannine Elliot

*Our VORP story this month again illustrates the GOOD NEWS incarnated through the VORP Peacemaking process. Our story is told by volunteer VORP mediator Jannine Elliot. Names and some details have been changed.*

My VORP case started with a call to Yolanda, a young woman who had been caught while joy-riding in a stolen car. Yolanda and her grandmother had received a VORP introduction letter regarding her case, and they were prepared to meet with me to hear more about the VORP process.

As we began the meeting at Yolanda's home, it became apparent that Yolanda's father was very concerned about the offense. He

shared that he had spent 10 years in prison, and he really wanted some help (i.e., counseling or some other kind of intervention) for his family. After I explained the VORP process to Yolanda and her family, they all thought it would be beneficial for Yolanda to accept responsibility and put this offense behind her. Yolanda agreed to a joint meeting where she could meet with her victim, face to face, to accept responsibility and make things as right as possible.

I then called Joe, the victim, who happened to have the same last name as Yolanda. Since Joe and his family did not speak English, I called the VORP staff and arranged for Phil Hofer, a Spanish-speaking VORP mediator, to assist me in meeting the victim.

Please see *Joy-ride*, Page 2

## Joy-ride: offense translated into new relationship

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Joe appreciated having Phil there, and he was glad the VORP process provided this opportunity to meet with Yolanda. Joe was also particularly interested in the fact that his and Yolanda's families had the same last name.

I started the joint meeting, which was held at Phil's home, by going over the ground rules. Everyone agreed to them. I then invited Yolanda to begin telling how she experienced the offense. She said that she and four other "friends" had been driving around in a car, which she did not know was stolen, and that she was the only one caught. Yolanda said she was sorry about what she did and about the damages to Joe's car.

Then it was Joe's turn to describe how he experienced the offense. Although Phil's translating slowed down the process, it actually helped us all to communicate better. Joe told about the impact the offense had on him, but he was more interested in expressing how concerned he was for Yolanda. He told her, "You don't know me, but I'm your friend." He described his family and how they handled their problems. Joe explained

how he was raising his child and said he also wanted to help Yolanda. He had lost money, but Joe was concerned about placing a financial burden on Yolanda's family. What Joe really wanted was for Yolanda to bring her family to his family's home for dinner. (We were invited too.) Yolanda agreed to Joe's offer and said she was really sorry.

As I prepared the agreement, Phil offered to try to help Yolanda get back into a high school she wanted to attend. Also, Joe said that he had been wanting to learn English but had been too busy working to support his family. Yolanda's grandmother offered to help him.

We said our good-byes and everyone shook hands.

It was a very peaceful meeting, and I am sure I will never experience anything like this again – a victim with heart, wisdom, and no malice.

The dinner went well as scheduled.

*Thanks Jannine! BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS!*

### Your monthly pledge needed for VORP staff expansion

VORP relies entirely on your contributions. We have no reserve account. VORP is behind – but only slightly behind – on our current bills, which is better than usual for this time of year.

In 1995, with your help, we plan to expand our case management and volunteer mediator support staff by adding a half-time employee. This would permit us to handle 150 more cases next year.

As we continue to increase the number of volunteer mediators, this goal is reachable. But it is impossible without your support.

*If you have never made a financial contribution to VORP, this Christmas might be a good time to start. Please consider it prayerfully!*

### VORG: inmate group seeks healing for victims

Continued from Page 1

One of the inmates, soon to be paroled, requested help in attempting to accept responsibility for his offense with the parents of his victim.

After many letters and visits, we contacted the victim's parents through their pastor. The first time we met, the father helped us understand the intensity of his feelings by describing the plan he had devised – he is employed in the electronics field – to destroy the prison and everyone in it. He added, "I don't plan to do it."

**Special thanks to Jennifer Gamble and Kent Collin who have donated a lot of time and talent to help cover our staff transition. And welcome to Trevor Siemens whom I will introduce later.**

After several conversations with me, my wife Roxanne, and their pastor, and after reading a letter from the offender which recognized the injustice, the parents decided it would be good for all of us to meet together.

The victim's mother said she has lived daily in fear that some day, unexpectedly, she would meet the offender face to face. She didn't know how she would be able to handle it. During our last visit she said she thinks meeting him in a controlled environment will help reduce that fear.

A very bad relationship is moving in a positive direction. Fear is being reduced. This is GOOD NEWS. The reconciling Spirit of Jesus is active. Please pray for all of us and our meeting.

Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you..."

The GOOD NEWS says Restorative Justice is a much more desirable option!

*Watch for an update on this case in an upcoming issue.*

*Sbalom, Ron Claassen*

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program