

## Ron recommends restorative '95 resolutions

Ron Claassen

It's time once again for New Year's Resolutions. I have four resolutions for you to consider in 1995.

#### Resolution #1

I will continue to think about, evaluate, and pray about my response I reaction to another's wrongdoing.

In one sense, I am suggesting that we consider how we respond to the criminal offense and the offender; and in another sense, I am suggesting that we consider how we respond in any situation — to anyone whom "I" think is doing something wrong (including colaborers at work and church). Is my response/reaction to desire that distance and punishment be imposed on the wrongdoer? Or is my desire for the wrongdoer to assume responsibility, restore those impacted by the offense, and find reconciliation? Galatians 6:1 says: "...if one is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

#### Resolution #2

1 will start (or continue) making a regular financial contribution to VORP.

I am not embarrassed making this suggestion because Roxanne and I have renewed our resolution, and we enjoy making our financial contributions to encourage restoration and reconciliation. We believe that what VORP volunteer mediators are doing is very important, and we enjoy supporting a restorative justice approach as a way of resolving an increasing number of the crime problems in our area. Increasing numbers of victims and offenders benefit, and the long-term viability of VORP becomes stable, as more individuals who

support reconciliation make VORP a regular part of their charitable giving. Regular contributions average from \$10 per month to \$100 per month. Some give monthly, others quarterly or annually. Please give what is appropriate for you and what you can give joyfully. Try it. You might find you really like it.

#### Resolution #3

I will attend a VORP mediator training session and start (or continue) working with VORP cases.

Not everyone who attends a VORP training works with a VORP case. That decision can be made after completion of the training. Even if you don't handle a case, you will be equipping yourself to handle conflicts that arise in your life in increasingly constructive ways. We are not born with these skills. They have to be learned. VORP mediators regularly and enthusiastically tell me about situations where they have used the VORP Peacemaking Model in their lives. The outcomes have been better than they expected.

#### Resolution #4

I will pray for all those involved with VORP cases: victims, offenders, mediators, criminal justice officials and VORP staff.

I believe prayer is an important part of VORP and restorative justice. We cannot give information that would violate confidentiality. But for those who would like to pray more specifically for VORP, we could inform you about who the mediator is in a particular case and some information about the type of case they are working on. If you are interested in joining those who are praying for specific cases, please write or call Trevor, Jesse, or Laura.

# Teenagers, mothers jump-start relationship after battery offense

Jane Shoji & Laura Fultz

Our story this month is about a common problem that often results in distance or increasing violence. But, thanks to the invitation and efforts of two VORP mediators, the parties turned it around and planted seeds of friendship instead.

The VORP mediators were Jane Shoji, United Japanese Christian Church, and Laura Fultz, Peace Community Mennonite Church. Names and some details have been changed.

The case was a battery offense involving two female teenagers. Jane made the first phone call to Marie, the offender. Marie and her mother Rosa were eager to meet with us.

We met at Marie's house and introduced ourselves. After Jane explained our role as

mediators and the VORP process, Marie told us about the offense.

Marie said that she and Stephanie, the victim, had been friends prior to the incident, until Stephanie began attending a new school and their friendship faded.

When one of Marie's cousins told her that Stephanie was saying bad things about her, Marie believed it. And when she saw Stephanie at a slumber party, Marie decided to do something about it.

Encouraged by her friends, Marie started to push and hit Stephanie. "As soon as the fight ended," Marie recalled, "I felt bad about it and wanted to apologize."

After the fight, Stephanie called her mother and went home. Marie tried to talk to them before they left, but Stephanie and her mother weren't interested.

Jane explained that VORP could help Marie and Stephanie listen to each other. Marie wanted Stephanie to know she was sorry and to put the offense behind her, so she and her mother readily agreed to meet with Stephanie.

Before we departed, Rosa told us she was unaware of the offense until she received a letter from the probation department. Had she known, Rosa said she immediately would have taken Marie to Stephanie's house to apologize. Rosa wanted us to know that she and her husband are good parents, and they care what their children are doing. We told Rosa that she would have the opportunity to share these feelings with Stephanie and her family at the VORP meeting.

Next we met with Stephanie and her mother Nancy. After we introduced ourselves,

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### Mediators expect celebration at follow-up meeting

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Nancy began to tell us how she felt about the offense. She was upset that adults at the party did not stop Marie from hitting Stephanie, and she was angry with Marie's parents for not contacting her to accept responsibility. Stephanie then explained what happened at the party. It was the same as we heard from Marie. Stephanie's main question was, "Why did she hit me?"

We told Stephanie and Nancy that the VORP process could help them address these questions and concerns. They agreed that VORP might be helpful and decided to meet with Marie and Rosa as soon as it could be arranged. The joint meeting was scheduled the following week at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, one of VORP's 40 Sustaining Friend congregations in the Fresno area.

After we welcomed the young women and their mothers, Jane reviewed the ground rules for the mediation, which everyone agreed to follow. In the first part of the meeting, Jane said she would ask Marie and Stephanie to summarize one another so everyone would be sure they were understood.

Marie told her story and then apologized. "I am sorry," she said. "It won't happen again." Stephanie summarized what Marie had said, then explained how she had experienced the offense. Stephanie concluded by saying that in the future, Marie should ask if someone has talked badly about her before she reacts. Marie summarized, agreed with Stephanie's suggestion, and apologized again.

Stephanie now recognized that Marie regretted what she had done. As they continued to talk, Marie assured Stephanie that she would not be so quick to believe rumors before checking them out. Stephanie restated that she had not, and would not, talk about Marie behind her back. Marie also agreed not to be influenced by her friends to

Stephanie and Marie decided it was time to put the offense behind them, and they agreed to greet each other with a friendly "Hi" when they meet in the future. Everyone agreed to a follow-up meeting in February to see how things are going.

Nancy and Rosa were then invited to share their perspectives. Rosa said she and her husband would have contacted Nancy if they had known what happened. Rosa further apologized for the hurt and inconvenience that Marie's offense caused their family. Nancy responded to Rosa with understanding and appreciation.

It was a wonderful experience to witness the reconciliation between these young women and their mothers. Stereotypes and walls of anger and hostility were broken. Stephanie honor their agreements, trust will continue to grow. We expect our February follow-up to be a time of celebration.

Thank God for the ministry of reconciliation and for the opportunity to practice it through

Thanks Laura and Jane! Blessed are the Peacemakers

and Marie now understand each other better, and mutual respect is being restored. As they

catch up, and while we are not in debt, we still bave no reserve. Now is a great time to start acting on RESOLUTION #2. Your contributions are tax-deductible.

VORP relies entirely on your contributions! The extra gifts in December belped us

Opportunities abound in 1995 to promote

More volunteer mediators are needed! VORP offers you an opportunity for training and

practice in resolving conflict through cooperation rather than coercion. The next VORP

mediator training events are scheduled for February 3-4 and March 20, 27, & April 3. The

training includes nine class hours of instruction and practice plus reading suggestions and on-

the job training. The fee is \$20 for those who plan to work with at least three cases and \$100

reconciliation, provide financial assistance

Ron Claassen, Program Director

for those who want the training for use in other settings

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