

## C.S. Lewis: 'Without good individuals you cannot have a good society...'

**VORP process includes invitation from 41 churches to seek reconciliation with God**

I've been rereading *Mere Christianity* (1943) by C.S. Lewis and thinking about VORP while reading. One of Lewis' many strong statements is that "there is very little disagreement about morality. Almost all people at all times have agreed (in theory) that human beings ought to be honest and kind and helpful to one another."

A second and equally important statement is that "none of us are really keeping this Law of Nature. If there are any exceptions among you, I apologize."

Could it be that his statements are still true today? I have worked with a wide variety of criminal cases and have yet to have an offender say that people shouldn't be honest and kind. Although we accept this in theory, I believe that we are all very selective in practice. These two statements taken together provide an interesting basis for VORP.

Another of Lewis' statements that I would like to relate to VORP is, "you cannot make an individual do good by law: and without good individuals you cannot have a good society." The image he uses to illustrate this idea is a fleet of ships on a voyage. "The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another's way, and secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order." "And however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta."

Lewis continues, "if we are to think about morality, we must think of all three departments: relations between man and man; things inside each man; and relations between man and the power that made him. These three, he adds, are interrelated. Problems in one area cause problems in the other areas, while health in one enhances the probability of health in the others."

Crime, using his image of a fleet of ships on a voyage, is like "ships colliding with other ships." What VORP does is to work with willing victims and offenders (and often others) on recognizing and repairing the damage created by the "collisions" and on making adjustments to prevent "collisions" in the future. By force a society might be able to reduce the "collisions," but it cannot repair the damage or set a new course — "make a man do good." That must be voluntary.

At the end of each mediation (when the "collision" damage has been repaired as much as possible), VORP sends a letter to the victim and offender congratulating them on their work together and inviting their evaluation. The letter also points to the standing invitation from God (relations between individuals and the power that made them) to work together on repairing any damage in that relationship and making overall directional adjustments. The letter offers the 41 local Sustaining Friend Churches as the mediators who can provide further help in repairing the damage and setting a new course.

*Shalom,*  
Ron Claassen

After meeting with VORP mediators, auto theft victims...

## Offender admits other offenses, requests mediation with victims

*C.S. Lewis says that health in one area of relationship (among people, within oneself, and between people and their Creator) increases the probability of health in the others. VORP helps move in the direction of health in our person-to-person relationships, which increases the probability of health in other relationships.*

*This month's story is written by Jennifer Gamble, a mediator and volunteer who has donated countless hours helping out in the VORP office. Kathy Stück was her co-mediator. Both attend College Community Church. Names and a few details in the story have been changed to protect identities.*

Frank was charged with stealing a minivan. He freely admitted his guilt to the theft. Frank explained that he and his friend (a girl) found the van after it had already been stolen and "stripped." They took the vehicle, and were caught joy riding in it several hours later.

Frank was remorseful for what he had done and said he was willing to pay his share of the damages, even though he had not damaged or taken anything from the minivan. Frank agreed to meet with Rick and Lisa, the van owners, to attempt to make things as right as he could.

Rick and Lisa were eager to meet with us. In fact, Rick told us that he was the one who had suggested VORP to Frank's probation officer in the first place.

One day after work, Lisa explained, she went to the parking lot only to find her minivan missing, with only a bit of broken glass on the ground where the van had been parked. Lisa had to find another way home.

Lisa and Rick explained that this incident was the third time the van had been stolen in the past year. When the van was recovered, they discovered that the middle seat was missing, a window was shattered, and the steering column was broken. Rick expressed his frustration, not only about bearing the financial burden of repairing these damages, which were not covered by insurance, but also about the seat being almost impossible to replace.

*(See 'Joy-ride,' page 2)*

## VORP mediator training offered in March, June

"Blessed are the Peacemakers" is filled with new meaning when I help a conflict turn in a peaceful direction, whether I am a mediator or one of the parties in the conflict.

VORP training can assist you in developing skills and strategies to help turn potentially destructive conflicts into ones that become constructive.

The next training events are **March 20, 27 & April 3** (Monday evenings, 6:30-9:30 PM); and **June 2 & 3** (Friday evening 6:30-9:30 PM; Saturday 8:30 AM-3:30 PM). To register or for additional information, call Trevor, Jesse, or Laura at 291-1120.

# Joy-ride leads teen in new direction

(Continued from page 1)

Rick and Lisa were eager to meet Frank and hoped they could put the offense behind them. We agreed to hold the meeting at College Community Church, where the VORP office is located.

Difficulties arose in scheduling a joint meeting but we finally found a date that worked for everyone. After introductions, we recognized the injustice by having Frank tell what he had done. Lisa and Rick also expressed how they had been impacted by the event.

Frank admitted to Rick and Lisa that what he had done was wrong, and Frank said he was willing to try to make things as right as possible. They decided it was most fair for Frank to pay half of the damages – about \$600. Frank said he would get a job to earn the money for the \$30 monthly payments.

We then discussed future intentions. Frank said that what he had done was “dumb” and that he wouldn’t take something that didn’t belong to him again.

We discussed that if Frank did not keep his agreement to make the payments, Rick and Lisa would be victimized again. We recognized together that as payments came in regularly, trust would grow. And we all agreed to meet again early in the summer to see how well the trust is building.

The signing of the agreement made a significant impression on Frank. As we took him home, Frank said he realized that he had accepted an important responsibility and was glad that this would help correct his mistake.

Frank was also accused of graffiti vandalism on two private residences and two businesses. Frank said he had not vandalized those places, but he pled guilty to the charges partly to avoid court and partly because he had done graffiti on other properties.

Frank offered and later showed us the properties that he had vandalized in the past. Frank told us he is willing meet with the property owners. That part of the case is still pending.

*Thanks Jennifer and Kathy!*

*[Trevor Siemens talked to Frank in late February, and he said he still fully intends to fulfill his agreement. Trevor Siemens is working with VORP through the Mennonite Voluntary Service program. He is from the province of Saskatchewan in Canada. Trevor is very well qualified. He is a graduate of Rostern Junior College, Swift Current Bible Institute, and the University of Saskatchewan (1989, B.A. – Sociology). Trevor also has experience in the field of social work and completed a B.S.W. degree in 1993. We are delighted Trevor is part of our staff.]*

## VORP Relies Entirely On Your Contributions

Finances are one of the critical factors that determine the extent to which VORP will influence the youth in our community. If VORP could grow to work with all appropriate cases, the influence would be greater.

I have no doubt that VORP reduces violence in our community and makes our community safer and less stressful. The impact will only be greater as churches and individuals of the community help VORP grow.

Your donations train, coordinate and assist volunteer mediators.

**PLEASE SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY**

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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