

# Temper tempered

*Victim-Offender meeting leads to greater understanding after violent outburst*

by Carol Pryor  
with Ron Claassen

*Our VORP story this month is from Carol Pryor, a VORP mediator and a member of Northwest Church. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.*

David said he was beginning to turn his life around when unfortunately, his response to a verbal altercation with his friend Sue, after a high school football game, interrupted his progress. He allowed his temper to flair during the argument. She called him some names, and made some insulting comments to him.

They got into her car and for a time he tried to ignore the incident. However, the insults continued and his temper was getting out of control. In an irrational moment, to demonstrate his temper, he jumped out of the car at a red light and began pounding his fists on the window of the car in front of them. To his surprise, his fist went through the car window. His hand was badly cut, and the driver of the car, Cheryl, was terrified, but unhurt.

When I met David, he was very personable and easy going as he told me what had happened. He also told me he felt bad about what he had done and was anxious to make it right. He wanted to apologize to the victim and pay for the cost of repairing the window.

I called the victim and arranged a meeting. It was a little complicated because the victim's parents were the owners of the car. Cheryl, the driver of the car, told me how she experienced the incident but chose not to meet with David. Her parents, Robert and Anna, were anxious to meet David. They told me how upset and angry they were with David when the incident had happened. Time had diminished their anger, but they wanted to

tell him how they felt when their daughter came home with glass in her jacket.

We arranged a joint meeting for the following week at the VORP office. The meeting began with introductions. I explained the VORP process to them and they all agreed to the ground-rules.

Then David began to describe the incident as he experienced it. When he finished, Robert and Anne were angry because it sounded like a lie. It sounded very different from the way Cheryl had experienced it. Then Anne talked with David about his temper. She gently encouraged him to seek help and look for the

good things in his life. He explained to her the efforts he had been making at trying to change. Robert and Anne began to understand David and his behavior. And David began to understand that Robert and Anne were loving and caring parents as they told how they experienced the incident.

The meeting was going well!

After everyone said all that they wanted to say, we began to talk about the cost of the broken window. Robert took out the bill for the broken window and gave it to David to look at. David was surprised at the cost. He thought it was a lot more than it should have been. After some discussion of costs and other options, he decided that he would pay it. He said he needed a few months to save the money.

We talked about the future. David assured Robert and Anne that this would never happen again. He had learned his lesson.

The agreement was filled in and signed. Everyone seemed satisfied and relieved. I wished them the very best and said good-bye. I stayed for a few minutes to finish up, and when I was leaving I noticed they were still outside talking. I asked if everything was OK. They said yes, and that they discovered that they had a mutual friend.

I left feeling very good about our meeting!

Thanks Carol!!!

"Blessed are the Peacemakers"

## Principles of Restorative Justice... Justice means 'making things as right as possible'

by Ron Claassen  
RJ Principles (Part 3)

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE has become a rather popular phrase in the United States, Canada, and in many other parts of the world among people talking about criminal justice. My concern is that Restorative Justice not become a meaningless term that is used to 'baptize' anything that someone wants to do. I have written eleven principles to help me better understand Restorative Justice. In the last two months I have discussed principles #1 & 2.

**PRINCIPLE #3.** Restorative Justice is a process to "make things as right as possible" and includes: attending needs created by the offense such as safety and repair of injuries, relationships and physical damage resulting from the offense, and attending needs related to the cause of the offense (addictions, lack of social or employment skills or resources, lack of understanding or will to make moral or ethical decisions, etc.)

**PRINCIPLE #4.** The primary victim(s) of a crime is the one(s) most impacted by the offense. The secondary victims are others impacted by the crime and might include family members, friends, criminal justice officials, community, etc.

**PRINCIPLE #5.** As soon as immediate victim, society, and offender safety concerns are satisfied, Restorative Justice views the situation as a teachable moment for the offender—an opportunity to encourage the offender to learn new ways of acting and being in community.

(See "Incapacitation Inadequate," page 2.)

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# Incapacitation inadequate

## Restorative Justice addresses damages, relationships, behavior

(Continued from page 1.)

These principles suggest that justice is a process for making things as right as possible rather than simply punishing the offender. In this short article I cannot develop a thorough rationale, so I would suggest that you read Howard Zehr's book *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. His book provides historical and biblical rationale.

Attending to safety needs and repair of injuries/damages means that the victim is as important as the offender in a Restorative Justice system. Incapacitation of the offender is not an adequate or a wise response since it alone does not address three concerns: (1) the injuries/damages experienced by the victim; (2) the negative relationship between the victim and offender; and (3) the antisocial behavior of the offender. Incapacitation and punishment that is harsh enough can force a short-term change in the behavior of the offender as long as the force continues to be applied. But doing this is very costly emotionally and financially. When the offender voluntarily and cooperatively changes, this is much more efficient and effective but cannot be guaranteed. I think we need to put much more effort into understanding what it is that makes it likely that an offender would voluntarily change behavior. We are learning some things through VORP and similar programs.

Even when I interview people who advocate very harsh punishment and ask them why they take that position, they tell me their real concern is to stop the violations and to create a safe community. We generally come to agreement that there is hope that a first time offender who decides to learn new ways of behaving could become a cooperative and contributing member of society. We agree that there are some offenders who are unable or unwilling to control their impulses to hurt people, and that those people cannot be allowed to roam the streets. We also agree that if there is not some constructive intervention to encourage the voluntary change with the first-, second-, and third-time offender the likelihood is higher that they will become part of the group that is unable or unwilling to control their impulses to hurt people.

Therefore, it seems both efficient and humane (and biblical: see both *Galatians 6:1* and *Matthew 5*) to design a Restorative Justice system that provides interventions which address the needs of both victim and offender and encourage voluntary and cooperative change.

The Restorative Justice Conference, October 6 & 7, is being planned as an opportunity for community, church, and system people to think and talk together about how we want to respond to crime.

## Volunteer mediator trainings set

The next training events are scheduled for September 22 & 23 and October 19, 26, & November 2. VORP Mediators tell us the skills learned in the VORP training positively impact their lives well beyond their involvement in VORP. Anyone is welcome to attend the training. The cost is just \$20 for those who work with at least three cases and \$100 for those who choose not to work with VORP cases. As more mediators are trained, the likelihood of more offenders choosing to become responsible is increased.

### '96 Entertainment Book

The VORP Auxiliary is selling '96 Entertainment books to raise funds for VORP. Entertainment books offer 50% discounts at hundreds of restaurants and events.

Each Entertainment book costs \$35 and will be available in September. A limited number of books are available for sale in the Fresno area, so call Laura today at 291-1120 to place your order.

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