

Faith community can play important healing role in response to crime

by Ron Claassen Restorative Justice Principles, Part 5

In the newsletters since May 1995, I have been presenting ideas for a Restorative Justice System. In the last four months I have included eleven principles, which if used to guide our response to crime, would change our community. It is time that we evaluate our responses to crime. If victim and offender are restored and more cooperative with society after, the response, then I would say it is a restorative response and let's do it more. The eleven principles, I hope, will contribute to a community wide dialogue and encourage a change in actions and attitudes that will influence our society to turn in a direction of being less violent and more peaceful and just.

PRINCIPLE #11. Restorative Justice, recognizes the important and vital role of the religious/faith community in preventing crime and in responding to crime.

It is the religious/faith community that has the responsibility of teaching a moral and ethical standard which is far above the base level of the law. In a recent conversation with our Chief of Police, Mr. Ed Winchester, he made the comment that "when we as police get involved, it is because the other informal systems in the community have

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lieve that he "If the social influence ligious/faith orientation is of the religious/faith Christian. I that community is high, when I live in ways taught in the need for the police the Bible, like should be low." mandments,

(agape-commitment to be constructive) ethic, and putting my energy in trying to find ways of bringing about reconciliation rather than revenge, I will not have much contact with the police as an offender. If the social influence of the religious/faith community is high, the need for the police should be low.

Another significant role of the religious/faith community is in the response to crime. The religious/faith community is to teach and assist the community in responsibility, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. Gal. 6:1 says that "...when one is caught in any trespass, those who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness....' While this was probably referring most directly to those in the faith community, with Jesus' suggestion to teaching to "love (agape—to be constructive with) the enemy" the restoration teaching would certainly apply to all who are "caught in any trespass." It is important to recognize that to "restore in a spirit of gentleness" does not mean to minimize the offense, say the offense is OK, or to overlook safety of the victim. True forgiveness will recognize the injustice, make agreements to restore the equity as much as possible (restitution + grace), plan for an accountable future in which the "trespass" does not continue.

Computer class rip-off worked off through YORP

"...when Mr. Johnson

went back to his

room, he found that

money was missing

from his wallet."

by Trevor Siemens with Ron Claassen

The VORP story this month is from Trevor Siemens, who works with VORP through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program. He is from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada He has been working with

VORP for more than one year now and focuses most of his time following up on the agreements made. Trevor attends Mennonite Community Church.

Susan is an energetic friendly teenager who attends a local school in Fresno. She enjoys school and works hard. In fact, she asked her computer teacher, Mr. Johnson, to give her some extra help to understand them better. Mr. Johnson was pleased that Susan was taking the initiative. Over the semester, Susan made regular visits to Mr. Johnson's office to learn more about computers, and to get help with her math.

Near the end of the school term, Susan was using the computer in Mr. Johnson's room, when he was called out. Mr. Johnson locked the door, and told Susan that when she was leaving she should make sure that the door was closed behind her and he left.

That afternoon when Mr. Johnson went back to his room, he found that money was missing from his wallet. He confronted Susan

about it, as she had been the only other person in the room, and she admitted to taking the money. The case was referred to VORP.

My individual meeting with Susan and her father and step mother started off very slow. Susan was willing to tell me what happened, but

in short answers when asked a direct question. She said she had no money, but was willing to work it off, and come to some kind of ar-

rangement. Susan's parents were very supportive of her and the VORP process. As the meeting progressed, Susan became more talkative and began volunteering more information about what happened.

My next meeting was with Mr. Johnson, the victim. He was very concerned that Susan get back on the right track and stop this behavior before she got into more trouble. He saw VORP as a good way to help this happen. His first thoughts on restitution were to have an agreement for Susan to do work to pay back the \$20. He didn't want Susan's parents to pay.

At the joint meeting, after introductions, I went over the ground rules, and asked both parties if they were willing to be constructive and try to make things right. All people present were willing, so we got started. I asked Susan if she could (See "Meeting" on page 2.)

YOU CAN BECOME A VORP MEDIATOR!!!

The next training is November 17 & 18.

In a meeting with some mediators one said, "yesterday I used the listening and problem solving skills I learned in VORP with my husband. It really helped us communicate better." The fee is \$20 for those who work with at least three cases during the first year and \$100 for those who just want the training for personal, church, or business purposes. Please call Laura to register at 291-1120.

Meeting offers victim, offender opportunity to rebuild relationship

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tell Mr. Johnson what had happened the day the money was stolen. Susan said no! So I went over the process again and asked if she was still committed to being constructive, and she said yes. So I once again asked

Susan to tell what happened. Susan said no! But I could see that Susan was crying, so we discussed how hard it was, right then, to face the person that she had stolen from and

to tell him what had happened. She was encouraged by everyone there that she had taken a good first step by coming to the meeting. Susan began to talk. She said that when he left "I continued with my work for a while but got bored. I saw that Mr.

the titles

Johnson had left his jacket on the chair, so I tried it on. I had told myself that Mr. Johnson wouldn't mind if I just tried it on. But then I noticed that something was left in the pocket. I put my hand in the pocket to feel what it was, and found a wallet. I

> looked inside the wallet and saw a \$20.00 bill and took it, and then left the room. I spent the money that afternoon before going home. I thought you would never

miss the money."

Susan

"Once again I asked

Susan to tell what

happened.

said, 'No."

Mr. Johnson thanked her for being honest, and talked about trust and how it had been broken by this incident, but he wanted to rebuild their relationship. Susan smiled when he said this. She added that she wanted to pay him back and that she would not repeat the incident.

The agreement included recognizing the injustice, a letter of apology and four hours of community work at the school to make things as right as possible now, and a commitment to not take what doesn't belong to her in the future. Everyone signed the agreement and celebrated with hearty handshakes.

It seems to all of us like a great start on the road of making things right and putting this event behind. What a great experience for me to participate in!! I am looking forward to following up on this agreement.

Blessed are the Peacemakers!!!

Thanks Trevor

VORP RELIES ON YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!!

Year to date expenses have exceeded income. It is not unusual but it is always uncomfortable. Due to your vision and generosity VORP has always ended the year paying all expenses and with a few dollars in the bank. This year VORP needs to make up a deficit of \$4,000 plus pay the idea of responsibility, restoration, reconongoing expenses. If you value the ciliation, and accountability, then you can help that happen more often by \$100 contributed during the year 1995 you contributing now. For each

will receive a certificate (transferable) which is good for one of five led by Ron Claassen and Elaine Enns related to different six hour seminars constructively handling conflict at home, church, or in the workplace. For a listing descriptions of the seminars call Laura at 291-1120.

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