

VORP

NEWS

of the Central Valley, Inc.

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VORP essential to community building process

by Ron Claassen

I would like to live in a community that is safe for everyone and where differences, and even offenses, don't scare us into doing things that destroy community.

I think VORP is an essential process in community building. VORP is a peace-making process that includes justice (restorative justice). When any offense happens, there is a breach in the community. How the community responds will determine if that offense leads in the direction of increased distancing, suspicion, and even hate which increases the likelihood of more offensive behavior and increases the potential for violence. It is also possible that the community response, while caring for all impacted by the offense, will lead in a direction that recognizes the violation and injustice in the offense and then searches for ways to make things as right as possible and ways that create a safer and more civil future.

Many offenses in the home, school, church and community are not crimes. Yet they are actions that are experienced as violations and injustices by at least one side and they will be transformed by the response of the community. Either they will move in the direction of escalating destructive conflict or they will be managed in a direction providing an experience of justice (restorative justice) and increased safety and peace.

A VORP type process is essential in our homes, schools, businesses, churches, and all organizations in our community.

If we are interested in building a community that values all of its members, then we must learn to value differences and learn how to include everyone in its privileges (not just a privileged group). We must not leave it to chance. Building this kind of community will take visionary leadership that encourages us, provides hope, and teaches us how to do it.

We need to examine our structures at home, school, church, workplace and in the community. Do they help us manage our differences? Do they help us deal creatively with our conflicts? If they don't, they need to be changed. Do our people have the skills and strategies to manage the conflict in their lives in constructive directions and do they have access to helpful structures when the conflict is too much to handle alone? Do our structures respond to the conflict by creating more distance and suspicion or do they help repair the breach? We can't afford to leave it to chance because that leads in the direction of ostracizing some and allowing only a privileged group to experience the privileges that should be available to everyone.

I recently attended a seminar lead by Roberto (Lopez) Chene. He is Co-Chair for the biennial National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution. He reminded us that building community is a process and to get there will require learning and applying some new skills and strategies. He said that to build a community we must not expect to achieve harmony by ignoring our differ-

ences, by asking some to become like others, or by accepting injustice. He said that community building is a process of building a climate in which we are willing to listen to and acknowledge our differences without fear. If we do this it will lead us to acknowledge our conflicts and if we deal with the conflicts creatively we will experience greater harmony. That, of course, will create greater safety in which we can acknowledge additional differences and identify additional conflicts which, if worked at creatively, will lead us toward greater harmony.

So, an inclusive and diverse community is not one in which there are no differences or conflicts, but a community in which there is confidence and safety to acknowledge differences and work through conflicts in ways that are respectful, reasonable, and restorative and provide accountability for everyone.

VORP is one important model that is helping develop this type of climate and helping us move in the direction of this kind of community.

From my faith perspective, this goal of working toward building the community is what God wants us to do. God values all people and wants us to value all people. The community God wants is not one without differences and without conflicts, but one in which all are valued and there is confidence that the differences can be recognized and the conflicts can be worked through to create even deeper harmony.

Offender discovers victim's genuine concern through VORP process

by Ka Xiong
with Ron Claassen

This story is from VORP mediator Ka Xiong. Ka is a member of the Hmong Alliance of Fresno, she is married and mother of two children. Ka has worked with several VORP cases in addition to her family responsibilities, full time job, and taking night classes,

Working with two cultures was both difficult and wonderful. Actually, I learned some things about my own culture. The offender, Peter, was from my own culture but we didn't think the same about the importance of restitution.

At our first meeting, Peter's mother said that they were very busy and they

didn't have time for unnecessary programs. All of a sudden, it hit me like a wave. They didn't really comprehend the idea of making things right with the person you've offended simply because you want to and not just because a court or probation officer has ordered you. I think it is important you do it because you want to do it and that you know you should do it.

I tried to explain what VORP is really all about and finally it seemed like they were beginning to understand. But, I felt a bit melancholy because it seemed to me that his mother was asking him to participate and he wasn't really inter-

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Take a byte out of crime

The VORP office has been making the best of obsolete computers for years, but has now begun to affect in efficiency. In order to make our paid and volunteer staff as productive as possible, we would like to equip the VORP office with more powerful computers. We hope to meet or exceed the specifications listed below.

2 Color SVGA Monitors

3 Computers

Pentium 75
16 mb RAM
200 mb hard drive
Windows '95
14.4 Modem (optional)
CD ROM (optional)

If you would like to donate any of these items or components, please call the VORP office at 291-1120.

VORP bridges cultural gap for Hmong teenager

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ested. But, I need to respect her decision.

I explained how the VORP process would work and then I asked him what had happened. He said, "We saw it and we did it." I think he meant that he saw this car and he and his friends broke the lock and took it. In one sentence he was done telling me what had happened. I wondered how this would work if we did get together with the victim.

He agreed to participate, although somewhat reluctantly.

Next I tried to reach the victims. I had a very hard time reaching them. I was thinking "God, my heart believes so much in this program ... but I don't really have the time for this. I am working, taking classes, and caring for my family. Please send someone else!"

I was about ready to give up when I got a call from the VORP office and they had talked with Francisco, the victim. I met with Francisco and he said he thought the program was a good idea and he wanted to participate.

I arranged a joint meeting. It was a very good meeting. I was amazed. Peter talked openly and comfortably about what he had done. Francisco seem to understand Peter and Peter seemed to know that Francisco was there to help make things better. When he asked about Peter's future plans, it seemed like Peter was unsure and lacked direction. Francisco told Peter that his father was a professor at

Fresno State University and that part of what he does it to help arrange career seminars. I could tell that Peter was really glad Francisco was genuinely interested in helping him.

When it came time to discuss the restitution, Peter and his mother explained how much the court costs were and how they were struggling to make it. Francisco suggested that he cut the amount for the damage in half but said that he thought it was really important that Peter pay for the restitution himself. He didn't want his mother to pay and he added that he could give him time to earn the money. I was struggling with whether that was fair but I could tell that this was what Francisco wanted to do. I felt joyful watching them work this out. I felt the grace of God was working.

I feel overwhelmed when I think about

the problems of our Hmong teenagers. There is a generation gap, the education differences, the culture limits, the ongoing effects of the Vietnam War, and the adjustment to living in a totally different country. I see teenagers wanting

to work and not able to get jobs. They need a place to start. My instinct is to turn around and walk away. But, from this experience, I realized that another approach is to work at it one case at a time.

Thank you for allowing me to share this wonderful experience.

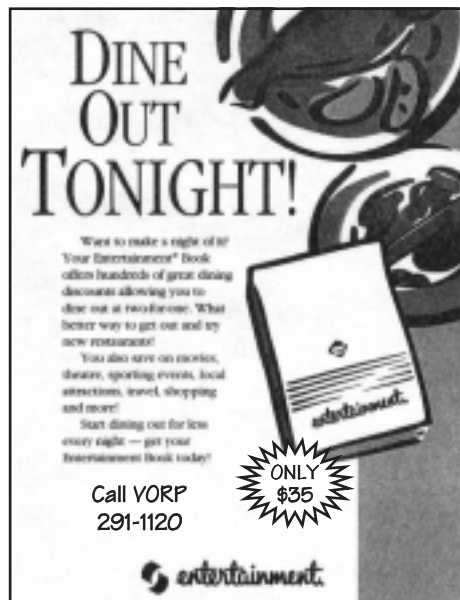
Thank you Ka Xiong.

Blessed are the Peacemakers!

VORP relies on your contributions

VORP relies on your contributions! VORP could double or triple its case load if we had the finances to employ the necessary support staff. While we probably wouldn't turn down a real large contribution, we think that VORP is most stable when hundreds of churches and individuals contribute in varying amounts. VORP has the potential to influence how justice is done.

If you are supportive of Restorative Justice, please give what is appropriate for you. \$120 per year (\$10 per month) per individual receiving this newsletter would allow VORP to triple its case load. If you are not already contributing, please start his month.



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