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4840 N. First Suite 107
Fresno, CA 937
(559) 224-1110

"Blessed are the Peacemakers"



*A church and
community based
program serving
Victims of Juvenile
Crime and their
Offenders.*

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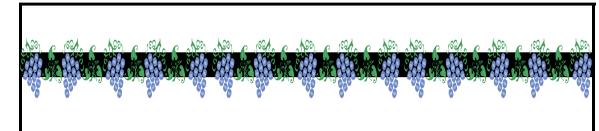
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Director's Corner

VORP on the Move

Well, we talked about it, and now we've gone and done it!

VORP has moved to a new office location at 4840 N. First, Suite #107. We're nestled between Gettysburg and Shaw across the street from Fashion Fair mall. The new office is near bus stops and close to the freeway. We're also next door to Prison Fellowship, and behind Samaritan Women's ministry, so we have some very encouraging friends surrounding us.

So, whether you are a donor, or mediator, or an interested community member, we invite you to stop by and visit us. We'd be glad to see you and show you our new place.

This step of faith is being made possible by College Community Church, together with some private matching support. You can read more about this in our section on Sustaining "Church" Friends.

We have a mediation story to share, of course. Drink in the "extraordinary" work of reconciliation being done by "ordinary" people right here in your own community.

You'll also hear a about our Fall peacemaker/mediator trainings; our summer Mediator Picnic and how a local t.v. station will promote VORP on the 4th of July.

I hope what you hear this month will strengthen and encourage your resolve to be about your own peacemaking, both at home and out in our community. This is a gift we can all learn to improve upon and give everyday in our city.

Good to visit with you. God bless your summer!



VORP NEWS

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NEW ADDRESS & PHONE

4840 N. First, Suite 107
Fresno, CA 93726
(559) 224-1110
(559) 224-1118 (FAX)

vorp@fresno.edu (e-mail)
www.vorp.org (web)

BOARD MEMBERS

Leah Ann Alcazar, *President*
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David Caes
Joby Dupuis, *Secretary/
Treasurer*
David Purvis

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Agreement Manager
Carl Goodmen, *Data Systems*
Suzanne Taylor, *Statistics*
Lorie Keys, *Office Support*
OASIS (Older Adult Social
Services), *Newsletter
Preparation*
Dulco Printing, *Newsletter
Printing*
Leah Ann Alcazar,

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their attackers.

Then, too, there is the general sense that such programs are not tough enough on criminals. This was certainly the perception that Governor Wilson had when in 1997 he vetoed a bill authored by Republican Assemblyman Jan Goldsmith that would have established a statewide program. So it seemed to Governor Davis as well, who during the last legislative session vetoed a similar piece of legislation authored by Republican Assemblyman Abel Maldonado.

In his veto message last September, Davis wrote that he supports effective treatment and prevention programs. However, he concluded that Maldonado's bill was pushing an unproven model. "The principles studied in this bill," Davis wrote last September, "appear to emphasize alternatives to incarceration without specifying that such program be proven effective

means ensuring public safety."

"I think there's a mind-set that the system should be retributive," acknowledges California Deputy Attorney General Leah Ann Alcazar, who serves as board chair of Fresno County's VORP on a volunteer basis. But Alcazar maintains that restorative justice shouldn't be thought of as an easy way out for offenders because it is difficult for them to face those they've harmed.

An estimated 60 percent of the offenders who enter Fresno County's VORP fully complete their restitution and another 15 percent partially complete it. That's not a perfect record, but if nothing else, notes Golden, it gives victims a voice in a system that often ignores them. "If it satisfies the victim, we are happy," she says.

—Patrick S. Pemberton, author

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This article first appeared in the March, 2001
issue of California Lawyer.

VORP Special Report To Air On Channel 49—Wednesday, July 4th

For your viewing pleasure: For 30 minutes on July 4th, tune your t.v. sets into a 7:00 p.m., pre-taped interview of Jay Griffith, Director of VORP, by Jim Grant, with the Diocese of Fresno. This will be aired on a show called, "The Grapevine."

California Lawyer Article:

Restorative Justice

Juvenile offenders negotiate penalties with their victims.

Neither Gov. Gray Davis, nor his predecessor, Pete Wilson, ever liked the idea. But in conservative Fresno County local officials gush over a nearly two-decade old victim-offender reconciliation program (VORP). Their goal now is to triple the program's caseload by 2003.

The Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, which serves either as partial or total alternative to incarceration for juveniles, gives first-and-second-time offenders the opportunity to negotiate with their victims a proper reparation, usually in the form of monetary payments or community service. When a deal is struck, the two parties work together until the agreed-upon conditions are satisfied. "Everything goes back to the court if nothing's resolved," says the program's director, Jay Griffith. The program currently handles 350 cases a year.

It's called restorative justice, and in its modern form the concept goes back to 1972, when a Mennonite church in Canada began a VORP. Six years later a small town in northwest

Indiana — Elkhart — became the first place in the United States to start one. Now, in California alone, there are 26 VORP programs, of which Fresno's is the oldest.

"It has been a learning experience for some of the kids," says Carolyn Golden, probation services manager for Fresno County Victim Services Department. "They realize how their behavior has affected their victims."

For the most part, the Fresno VORP concerns itself with misdemeanors and minor felony offenses such as car thefts, residential burglaries, and vandalism, although about 15 percent involve more serious crimes, including assaults. And in some communities VORPs have gone further. In San Luis Obispo the VORP there decided just two months ago to take on its first Proposition 21 case (i.e., one in which the juvenile defendant committed a serious enough crime to be tried in adult court).

This, however, is where these programs get especially controversial. Fresno County's chief deputy district attorney, Worth Vogel, for one, believes that the program may work well for property offenses, but in criminal offense it's too traumatic for assault victims to meet

"The Ice Cream Man"

By Becky Beane, Reprinted by permission of Prison Fellowship, Jubilee Magazine, 2000

Permission was given by all parties to use their actual names in this story. It is our common practice, however, to change names for our stories.

Corey Moore sinks shyly into the couch, dwarfed by his mom and dad who sit on either side of him. The soft-spoken 12-year-old, who excels in math and likes to ride his bike, hardly fits the image of "juvenile delinquent." Yet he committed a crime that got him expelled from school and confined to a youth detention center for four days. "It was scary," he says quietly. "It didn't feel right, because I wasn't sleeping in my own bed." He snuggles closer—more securely—to his dad.

One Sunday last spring, a friendly water-balloon fight outside Corey's Fresno, California, elementary school turned destructive when one of the kids found a piece of a water pipe and smashed it against a window. A few of them clambered through the opening, discovered a baseball bat, and broke into three classrooms: stealing some things, "tagging" the walls with scribbles. Then they broke into the teachers' workroom that housed their mailboxes, a photocopier—and a freezer filled with ice cream treats. Inhibitions depleted, the children zealously scooped out ice cream sandwiches, chocolate bars, and other frozen fare—carrying out armloads of stolen snacks while fumbled booty melted into pools on the floor.

Corey "went along," not thinking "I'd get in much trouble." But the next week, police escorted the boy out of the school in handcuffs.

"I remember looking into his eyes and feeling so disappointed," says Terry Marinaro, then the school's vice-principal. "And I knew he saw that

in my face."

A short time later, Mariano had the opportunity to express her feelings to Corey directly—as part of the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) of the Central Valley. "You were somebody we knew and trusted and liked," she told him on behalf of the teachers and the other administrators. "And we felt so violated." Corey started to cry.

"But that was good," says Mariano. "He released his feelings and demonstrated his remorse."

The affected teachers also spoke openly, sharing the hurt, the fear, and the insecurity they and the students had felt when they first entered the vandalized classrooms that Monday morning. Each time a victim or one of his parents spoke, Corey had to summarize what was said—until the other person felt sure Corey understood. The child shared his side in the same way—a process that took time, patience, and courage.

Then, with the help of a VORP mediator, Alice Griffith, the group talked about "how to make things right," explains Marinaro. In the end, Corey agreed to work 43 hours of community service at a local church to cover repairs and cleanup costs. He wrote letters of apology—and then read them aloud—to the teachers and students of the damaged classes ("Probably the hardest part," claims his dad, Lawrence). And he bought gift certificates for



(Continued on page 4)

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the teachers.

"There were a few bumps," admits VORP director Jay Griffith, referring to the maintenance and food-service tasks assigned by the church. "Sometimes Corey had to go back and clean up a few areas again. There was a certain standard he had to meet. And it was important to work those things out as soon as they came up."

Overall, Corey's perseverance and willingness to take responsibility for his actions impressed his parents, the school staff, and his probation officer, and four months after the initial meeting they came back together for a time of celebration. "I don't think he'll do something like that (crime) again," says his mom, Betty. "I think he's mature enough now to know what he did was wrong."

Corey agrees he will stay out of trouble, despite the lure of his peers. "I'm going to think for my own self next time!"

Terry Marinaro lauds the way VORP personalized the offense for Corey by bringing him face-to-face with his victims and their pain. "He learned empathy"—a quality she deems essential in conflict resolution. She also endorses the program's success in giving power to both victim and offender as they worked on a resolution. "We created it together," she says, a joint accomplishment that gave both sides a sense of satisfaction, balance, and justice. In the traditional juvenile justice system, she contrasts, victims usually feel sidelined by the court, their needs ignored. And young offenders who feel fleeced of their power—and consequently their self-worth—often angrily seek to avenge that identity.

VORP gave Corey "a lot of personal power," Marinaro adds. "He was never made to feel that he was a bad person, just that he had done something wrong and had the opportunity to make it right."

We can learn to share power with kids, "or they may find out that they can take it with a gun," cautions Ron Claassen, who in 1982 founded the Fresno-area VORP, a program birthed in Ontario (Canada) and now multiplying throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia (and New Zealand). Ron served as VORP director for 17 years before resigning in November (1999) to concentrate on his responsibilities as a university professor.



I would like to introduce everyone to my wife, Alice Griffith. Alice is an RSP teacher at Sunnyside High School, where she also coaches JV girl's volleyball. She took an interest in mediation after she took an interest in me. Well, that's what she tells me, anyway. Alice helps with mediating and training mediators. She also helps me to balance home and work.



Sustaining CHURCH FRIENDS



"College Community Church MB in Clovis has been a long term supporter of VORP.

One of those tangible expressions of support has been the providing of office and training space at a very nominal below cost rent.

With VORP's increased need for space and a move to "market rent" facilities, the Stewardship Commission at CCCMB realized that VORP's move would generate some real sticker shock in rent payments.

To ease this problem and to encourage VORP to develop new donors, CCCMB is contributing up to \$300 per month for six months on a matching basis with new money raised by VORP specifically earmarked for rent.

College Community Church MB wishes VORP all the best in it's new office."

Ken Neufeld
Chair, Board of Trustees
College Community Church

2001 Volunteer Mediator Training

September 14 & 15

Friday: 6:30 p.m.—9:30 p.m.
Saturday: 8:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

October 5 & 6

Friday: 6:30 p.m.—9:30 p.m.
Saturday: 8:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

November 2 & 3

Friday: 6:30 p.m.—9:30 p.m.
Saturday: 8:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

The cost is \$20.00 for 9 hours of training and 8 hours of field work as you do your first case.

We only ask that you serve as a mediator on 2 additional cases sometime during your first year.

CALL THE VORP OFFICE TODAY!

Mediator Picnic Announced!

Saturday, August 4th, 2001

9am-1pm

Fresno Pacific University's "Reeve's Home"

R.S.V.P. Requested

On the 4th of August we plan to celebrate the involvement of mediators who've given their time and support to serving with VORP. We are planning a time of sharing stories, being encouraged in our service, and some good old-fashioned fun with food and games. Donors and Churches will be invited too! Invitations will go out in early July. We hope you can make it!