VORP is a Community Building Process

by Ron Claassen

VORP meetings range from a minimum of 3 or 4 people: victim, offender (offender’s parent or other responsible adult if juvenile offender), and mediator, to hundreds as in包括 extended family, victim support, community, and faith community representatives, and government representatives. (We call this larger group process a Community Justice Conference—CJC.)

If all are willing, the VORP mediator leads the group in a peacemaking process to:

1. (1) recognize the injustices (tell/listen/clarify/summarize the events and impact in the violation and accept responsibility);

2. (2) restore the equity and balance between them as much as possible (agree on what can be done to make things as right as possible now—realizing that to see the violation and offender as victims begins to start growing. Victim, offender, and community members experience restoration and re-integration. Follow-up is important because agreements are kept, trust grows.

VORP is a community building process. VORP is a character building process. VORP clarifies and strengthens community values. VORP is a peacemaking process.

VORP, now starting its 16th year in Fresno, is a community process for a safer, more respectful, and just future. The process is completed, forgiveness and reintegration begin to happen and trust starts to grow. Victim, offender, and community members experience restoration and re-integration. Follow-up is important because agreements are kept, trust grows.

VORP relies heavily on short-term (usually less than two years) volunteers. Although they are short term, they serve with energy and enthusiasm combined with high level skill and competency.

Phil and Julie Bender served as short term volunteers with VORP while they were being seminary training pastors. They served between March and July. They filled a very important role for us while we were waiting for Amy to arrive. They have returned to pastor church in Ontario, Canada.

VORP Sustaining Friend Churches in 1997

These churches have formalized their mutual supportive relationship with VORP. If your church is listed below, please contact Elaine Enns (455-5843) or Jay Griffith (291-1120) for details.

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VORP Sustaining Friend Churches in 1997 were: Baptist Temple Church, Bethany Church, Bethlehem Church, Butler Avenue Church, Campus Baptist Church, College Church at Chico, College Community Church, College Congregational Church, Downtown Church, Easton Southern Baptist Church, Faith United Methodist Fellowship, First Congregational Church, First Mennonite Church, Reedeley, First Presbyterian Church, Fresno Christian Reformed Church, Fresno Christian Fellowship Church, Friends Community Church.

God’s Family Church, Harmony Freewill Baptist Church, Iglesia De Dios, Memorial United Methodist Church, Mennonite Community Church, New Hope Community Church, North Fresno Church, Northpark Community Church, Northwest Church, Our Lady of Victory, The Peoples Church, Pilgrim American Congregational Church.

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Reedley Men- nonite Brethren Church, Sanger First Presby- terian Church, Second Baptist Church, St. Columbus’ Episcopal Church, St. Luke’s United Methodist Church, St. Paul Newman Center, Trinity Lutheran Church, United Japanese Christian Church, Valley Christian Center, Wesley United Methodist Church, and Westside Church of God.

Staff Transition Is Part of Our Lives

Staff transition is part of our lives because VORP relies heavily on short term (usually less than two years) volunteers. Although they are short term, they serve with energy and enthusiasm combined with high level skill and competency.

Amy Dethwiler arrived at VORP in September. She is a full time volunteer with the Men- nonite Voluntary Service program and has assumed primary responsibility for case manage- ment. Amy is especially enjoying her responsibilities while contributing a won- derful cooperative spirit. Amy is a recent graduate of Butler College in Burtt, Ohio where her major was social work and minor was criminology.

Victoria Buisbazen is in her second year with VORP. She is a full time volunteer with the Mennonite Voluntary Service program and is assuming primary responsibility for fol- low-up in addition to many other responsibilities.

Victoria brings a wonderful sense of hu- mor along with her dedication and compe- tency. Victoria is from New York and is a re- cent graduate of State University of New York at Geneseo.

Jay Griffith is continuing his work with VORP and is now employed full time. Jay is respon- sible for our CJC cases and has also assumed significant responsibility in working with our Sustaining Friend Churches. We are grateful for Jay’s willingness to serve in this way and enjoy his cooperative spirit.

VORP Board of Directors Assumes Both Financial and Policy Responsibility

VORP organized as a non-profit, public benefit corporation which is guided by a board of directors who come from a wide range of churches in the area. Board mem- bers shoulder significant responsibility so that hundreds of victims and offenders can have the opportunity to experience Restorative Justice.

Our current and continuing board mem- bers are: Dave Kleshock, President; Michael Blues, Vice President; Carol Siervis, Secretary; Mike Manghera; and Ron Claassen. New board members this year are Leah Ann Alcayzar and Mary Beth Hogan.

Thanks again to those who are currently serving, are considering serving, and to all those who have served in the past.

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Jame Mietzad from Pennsylvania, volun- teered part-time from January to July. For several years Jame has worked for a period of time to earn enough money to volunteer for a period of time. We are grateful for his work with us. He moved to Indiana to volunteer for a community mediation center.

Julius Lockett was a full time employee, funded by a grant, from January 1996 to May 1997. We were sorry to have the grant money for him run out. He is now a teacher at the boot camp and continues to take cases as a volunteer mediator.

Laura Fultz, who had worked with VORP for several years, first as a volunteer and later as an employee, is continuing her work in February to take a position with OASIS. Laura is continuing to serve as volunteer coordinator of the VORP Auxiliary, which in the fall put on a wonderful fundraising event of theater, silent auction, Margaret Hudson sculpture raffle, and refresh- ments. Laura contributed a lot to VORP over the years and we miss her cheerful presence.

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VORP Mediators Are Volunteers Who Put Their Values and Faith into Action


“Blessed are the Peacemakers.”

Referrals Were Received Primarily from Criminal Justice Officials

Most referrals were from Juvenile Probation as a diversion for non-violent first and second time offenders and for more serious offenses from the court as part of a sentence. Some adult referrals were received from the courts. A few case referrals were received by police. Occasionally we receive a self referral (either victim or offender), and these tend to be the most serious cases we receive. For example, I am currently working with a case involving an incarcerated offender, his family, and the brother and pastor of a victim who was killed in a drunk driving crash. 659 referrals were received in 1997.

Special thanks to Larry Price (Chief Probation Officer), Phil Erdman (Probation Restorative Justice Coordinator) and all of the criminal justice officials who made referrals or in some other way helped us to do our job. VORP couldn’t work without your support. We recognize the wealth of experience and wisdom among you. We appreciate your cooperation, advice, and counsel.

Financial Contributors Are Essential Partners

Because of your generous giving, and using our small reserve from 1996, VORP income slightly exceeded expenses. This is a miracle, given how it looked at the beginning of November. Thank you!

Without your support VORP would not exist in Fresno. The ongoing stability of VORP has been those individuals and churches who have so faithfully continued to contribute year after year and those who have joined more recently.

1997 income was $63,551: 12.5 percent from board members, 49.5 percent from individuals, 19 percent from churches, 5 percent from fund-raising events, 8.8 percent from various grants, 2.2 percent from training events, and 2.9 percent from honorariums, etc.

On behalf of all of us at VORP, we thank all of you for making Victim Offender Reconciliation a reality in Fresno County.

Thanks also to College Community Church for office space, Pacific Printing for special printing assistance, Mark Roy for newsletter layout, Oasis for preparing the newsletter for mailing, and David Kieschaed for maintaining our computers.

The VORP Auxiliary Helped with Fund-raising

The VORP Auxiliary benefited VORP through several fund-raising efforts. The evening at the theater, “A Christmas Carol,” with gourmet coffee, specialty desserts, silent auction, and raffle was a very special fun event also designed to educate about and benefit VORP.

Special sponsors for the evening were the law firm of Boles, Fransen, and Boedthorn, and Margaret Hudson’s Earth Arts Studio. Auxiliary members were Leah Ann Alcazar, Carol Fransen, Carol Pryor, and Laura Fultz.

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