Trust, forgiveness revisited in light of current events

by Ron Claassen

In the light of national and international events recently, I thought it might be interesting to review two of the basic principles that guide VORP. It just might be that we can gain some insights regarding possibilities for much longer-term solutions.

The national and international situations that I have in mind are the bombings of the embassies and the counter attacks, the situation with our president, and the situation in Cambodia (this is heightened for us because our son and daughter-in-law, Kevin and Jennette, are now living in Cambodia serving with Mennonite Central Committee).

Principle: Trust grows when agreements are made and kept and trust goes down when we are unwilling to make agreements or when agreements are made and not kept.

In our last E-mail from Cambodia, they were requesting our prayers that the leaders were being willing to talk and make some agreements. This principle would indicate that trust will continue to go down until they are willing to talk and make some agreements. They also asked for prayers for the people of Cambodia. They said that they have talked to several who cannot ever remember living in peace.

This principle would tell us that trust will continue to go down between those responsible for the bombings until they talk and make some agreements. Generally, the one with the greater power is least interested in talking.

One of the general agreements that we have is that people will not intentionally deceive us. When that happens, trust goes down.

Principle: Forgiveness is the process of making some agreements where in the past there were none (Love—agape).

In just future, there is mutual agreement that injustices have been recognized, equity has been restored, and agreements have been made for a peaceful and just future. (See Peacemaking Model: Figure 1.)

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 this month.

Offender ‘makes things right’ after school vandalism

VORP Participants relieved to put incident behind them

by Jill Yergensen and John Lawless with Ron Claassen

Our story this month is from two Fresno State University students, Jill Yergensen and John Lawless. Approximately 50 students last year took the VORP training as part of their course of study.

The offender and three buddies jumped over the fence at a local high school and broke a window in one of the classrooms. One of the offenders (our client) denied it was him and he was anxious to stay out of juvenile hall for a few hours before being released to his mother.

After talking about how to restore the equity and about the resources available to Samuel and his mother, it was decided that Samuel would write a letter of apology to the individual receiving this newsletter would allow VORP to triple its case load. If you are not already contributing, please start this month.

Near the close of the meeting we asked Samuel what his future intentions were. We were considering might be: Are any of the

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Recognizing injustices, restoring equity, ensuring accountability keys to resolving current crises

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Focusing on the mediation process rather than on blaming or fighting can be a more constructive approach to resolving conflicts. It requires that someone other than the victims or the offenders is a neutral party to mediate the situation. The mediator helps the parties to understand each other's perspectives and to find a way to resolve the conflict. This can be especially important in cases where there is a risk of violence or retaliation.

A case recently mediated through VORP illustrates the potential benefits of using a mediator. The case involved a young boy who had vandalized a school and was facing charges. The victim was a student at the school, and the offender was a student who had been expelled from another school for similar behavior. The victim had filed a complaint with the school district, and the case was referred to VORP for mediation.

The mediator worked with the victim and the offender to understand their perspectives and to help them find a resolution. The mediator also worked with the school district to ensure that the victim was properly compensated for any damage caused by the vandalism. The mediator was able to help the parties reach an agreement that was acceptable to both sides.

The case went so well because all parties were willing to participate. I look forward to becoming more involved with VORP. I realize that all cases will not be as easy as this one, but I now feel better prepared for the next challenge.

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