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## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

VORP News - December 1986

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among all people."

This is God's vision for the world and we see pictures of what it might look like throughout the scripture. One description we find in Isaiah 11:6, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, and the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a child will lead them," and Micah 4:3b, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Jesus taught how all people would live if this vision were a reality. Scripture also reminds us that not all people will live this way. Jesus demonstrated in his life how to live this vision out and his death also demonstrates that not all people will accept this vision and live by it. Scripture also describes that people who have experienced reconciliation with God will live in the direction of this vision. For me participation in VORP is one avenue for living and promoting God's vision of shalom for the world.

Jonathan Neufeld, program manager of VORP in Tulare County, has agreed to share one of the first cases that he worked on in Tulare County with us. As usual the names and some of the details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

"Jose" and his next door neighbor "Bob" had been friends since they were kids. Now they were both 17, and I was coming to meet with them about a pickup they had broken into one night when they ran out of things to do.

Jose's mother let me into a warm, dimly lit room with a fireplace and dark green overstuffed chairs. She always had a worried expression in her eyes, even when she smiled. Her English was limited. Jose was called in, and the four of us (Jose's father had joined us) sat in the dim front room and discussed Jose's offense.

Jose started off by saying that he knew he had made a mistake, even though he didn't actually break the window for which restitution had been ordered. He had been there and therefore felt it was as much his responsibility as Bob's. He went on to tell just how they had gotten caught and about their subsequent efforts at saving up money for the payments they knew they would need to make. Jose was eager to make it right with the victim.

After leaving Jose's home, I walked next door to where Bob lived. He wasn't home, but his mother asked me to explain VORP to her and then assured me that Bob would be willing to participate. A few days later, I talked to Bob and he confirmed his willingness to meet with the victim and fix things with him.

I met with "Mr. Thomas", the victim, at the fire department where he is an administrator. He was young, good-looking, and easy to talk to. After sketching the outlines of how VORP works, I asked how he discovered the damage to his pickup and what his response was. He told me that the truck had been parked at the repair shop the night of the incident. The police called him when they caught the boys trying to break into it. When he picked up the truck after it had been repaired, he noticed that there was some other damage not stated in the police report. He had questions about how that had happened, and also about why the boys had chosen that particular place and his particular vehicle. He wasn't terribly upset about the incident, but he did want to meet the boys and ask them a few questions, as well as get his window fixed. He offered a place at the fire department offices to meet,

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and, although it wasn't very "neutral", it was agreed to.

The final meeting was in the small confernece room at the fire department. The room was bright and warm. It had a large table with 8 or 10 lightly padded chairs around it. Tan blocklite walls and a brown carpet made it feel hard, and it seemed to get smaller when all of us were seated around the table.

Bob and Jose were there, along with Jose's parents, Mr. Thomas, and myself. We all introduced ourselves, and then I asked Bob and Jose to tell what had happened the night of the incident. They told the same story they had told me, each in turn adding to the other's description of events and filling in their part in the breaking of Mr. Thomas's window.

Mr. Thomas then asked his questions about how they chose his truck, what they wanted inside it, and how the other damage not in the report had occurred. The boys answered his questions as best they could, saying several times how they now knew that they had "done something stupid" and that they intended to not let it happen again.

Mr. Thomas told them that when he was a kid, he had gotten into some trouble too. He had "gotten smart and stopped," though, before he had gotten into serious trouble. He encouraged the boys to do the same. While he was talking, both Jose and Bob sat quietly with their heads down. Afterward, each of them agreed that Mr. Thomas was right and they were determined not to end up in deeper trouble.

The estimate for what it would cost to replace the window was easily agreed to, and the boys paid at the meeting. I congratulated both Jose and Bob for their willingness to take responsibility for their actions. Mr. Thomas also seemed pleased with the outcome of the meeting. Even Jose's mother, who had sat through the whole meeting with her worried eyes bouncing back and forth between Mr. Thomas and her son managed a response. When the meeting was finished, she stood up, said to Mr. Thomas in her broken English, "We are sorry," and smiled in her worried sort of way.

Another training is being planned for volunteers in January. In order to increase our case load we will need additional volunteers. If you or someone you know would be interested in considering training or would like to reserve space at our next training please call Greg Stobbe in our office at 291-1120. The training will be conducted on two successive Thursdays, January 15 and 22 from 6:00-10:00 p.m. on each evening.

Discussing finances in VORP seems to always require both a good news and bad news report. The good news is that many people are giving and many new people are responding to our current fund-raising efforts in which we are asking interested people to consider making a regular monthly donation in order to give us the ability to budget based on the pledges that you have made. The bad news is that we will end 1986 with approximately a \$3,000.00 deficit unless a Christmas miracle happens.

All of us on the VORP staff, Christine Slonetsky, Greg Stobbe, Roxanne Claassen, Jonathan Neufeld, and I would like to wish all of you a very happy and blessed Christmas.

I pray that as you consider Christmas and the coming New Year that God will guide you in your involvement in Shalom making.

Shalom,  
Ron Claassen

In addition to the commitment of volunteer mediators and financial contributors we have experienced very helpful criminal justice system officials. Attached is a letter of support from Don Hogner, Chief Probation Officer in Fresno county. I have appreciated Don's advice and encouragement. He and his department officials have watched us and now have a high degree of confidence in us and the VORP process. They have seen the positive results of inviting offenders to consider 'making things right' with their victims.