



## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News  
January 1990

### 1989 REVIEW

**BACKGROUND:** Crime is more than law breaking or an offense against the state. Crime creates obligations and establishes fear and negative relationships. Justice is more than following right rules, establishing blame, and punishing. Biblical Justice meets needs and works at making things as right as possible. Even the legal systems that contributed to Western Law--Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Anglo Saxon--viewed crime primarily as an offense against victims, their families, and their communities. Without VORP, even if an offender recognizes his/her guilt there is no place in the justice process and no one assigned to help work at making amends. Even if restitution is ordered it is viewed as part of the punishment. The VORP process makes restitution part of the restoration process for the victim, the offender, and the community. VORP volunteers are advocates for both victims and offenders. Constructive solutions and resolutions, to a conflict we have defined as a "crime," are found when willing victims and offenders are valued and encouraged to work on the problem together. The trained volunteer mediator helps them to recognize the injustice (discuss the offense and violation, both facts and feelings), to restore the equity between them (to agree on what payment can be made or work done or other symbolic gesture completed to indicate a sincere attempt to make up for the disruption and loss), and to agree on the future (assurance the victim does not need to worry about it happening again).

**VOLUNTEER MEDIATORS** are trained in conflict management and mediation skills and the VORP process. First the mediator meets with the offender (parents of juveniles are included) to invite them to accept responsibility for what happened and to "make it right" with the victim. If the offender is willing, the volunteer meets with the victim to invite them to participate. If both agree to meet, the volunteer arranges and leads a meeting. Our goal is that this constructive process will facilitate restoration for both the victim and the offender and movement in their relationship from hostility toward caring. In 1989 the following volunteer mediators worked with cases: Robert Ackerman, Mark Allen, Dick Andris, Ed Barton, Walt Bergen, John Bergey, Steven Bolm, John Border, Bill Botzong, Bill Braun, Ty Buxman, Cynthia Callaghan, Jeff Carroll, Ray Castro, Ron Claassen, Roxanne Claassen, Jinny Daily, Steve De La Torre, James Diaz, Tom Dorsch, Rudy Dyck, JoAnn Elizondo, Elaine Enns, Sue Ewert, Frances Ewy, Dianna Fain, Stan Fast, Ken Friesen, Mark Gudgel, Allen Guenther, Tino Guevara, Lee Heinrichs, Joel Hernandez, Don Hiebert, Mark Hill, Sharon Hoard, Shari Horton, Stan Isaac, David Janzen, Ken Janzen, Bill Jost, Shannon Jost, Dave Kleschold, Jerry Linscheid, Tom Loper, Mike Maghera, Elmer Martens, Sharon Martin, George Martzen, Marianne Merritt, Dan Neufeld, Simone Ostrander, Rudy Perez, Karen Peters, Michael Pierce, Galen Quenzer, Mabel Reese, Dalton Reimer, Hugo Reimer, Diane Rustigan, Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, Gretchen Schmidt, Greg Stobbe, Russell Templeton, Jim VanWagenen, Lori Velasquez, James Wenger, Rachel Weith.

**A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR TRAINED VOLUNTEER MEDIATORS!! YOU MAKE VORP POSSIBLE!!**

**REFERRALS ARE RECEIVED** from the Police Probation Team (an informal sentence as an alternative to entering the formal court process), the Court/Probation (as part of a formal sentence), and victims or offenders.

**STATISTICS:**

Number of case referrals:	1983 - 89
	1984 - 206
	1985 - 315
	1986 - 309
	1987 - 404
	1988 - 476
	1989 - 536

The most frequent offenses included: vandalism, burglary, auto theft, petty theft, and battery. Some referrals were returned because they were not appropriate or the parties were not available. Of the balance, both parties were contacted and cases were completed in 68% of the cases: 46% had joint meetings and signed a restitution contract, 20% did not meet but signed a contract for restitution and 2% had a joint meeting but did not sign a restitution contract. 32% were terminated because either the victim or offender were unwilling.

The contracts amounted to \$32,936 in monetary restitution and 335 work hours for victims. Of the contracts, 56% are completed, 19% are not yet due, 22% are over due (but active), and 4% were considered bad debts. Since our beginning our collection rate has run between 90% and 96%.

OUR STAFF is primarily made up of persons who are serving through voluntary service programs related to their church. They each bring a special vitality and dedication that is very beneficial to VORP. They make it possible for VORP to have a high quality staff while not having the financial resources to hire such qualified people. By volunteering to work on a small cost of living stipend they are each making a significant financial contribution. Currently our staff includes Shannon Jost (2nd year), who volunteered through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program and Rudy Dyck (1st year) and Elaine Enns (1st year) through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program. Gretchen Schmidt left us this fall after more than 20 years of service and Mark Allen left in late Spring. They both served through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program. I am employed two days per week for the Fresno County Program.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS represent many different churches and occupations. VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. is a non-profit, public benefit corporation. Our Board of Directors assume both policy and financial responsibility. Each member assumes responsibility to raise a portion of the budget. This is a major commitment and each member deserves a great deal of credit for their dedication and voluntary involvement in making VORP a possibility in Fresno County. Our Board of Directors in 1989 was Russell Templeton, President; Deborah Ohanesian, Secretary/Treasurer (resigned to mother adopted child); Margaret Hudson; Mark Hill; DH Mapson; Richard Unruh; Dianna Fain; Denise Jackson; and Ron Claassen. Our advisory committee includes Dave Purvis, Ken Quenzer, Buck Levis, Rev. Lopez and Rev. Lanier. In addition to these people there are many in both the church community and the criminal justice system who opened their doors and storehouse of experience and information to me to seek advice throughout the year. Judge Austin, Presiding Juvenile Judge; Verne Spiers, Chief Probation Officer; and Joe Walden and Roger Palimino, Probation Division Chiefs are just a few who have been very open and helpful.

FUNDING: The service has been offered to victims, offenders, community, and the criminal justice system as a service/ministry from the "church". The training of volunteers, staff support for volunteers, liaison work with the criminal justice system officials, and administration are paid for by board members, other individuals, churches, businesses, service clubs, and church agencies that share the VORP vision. The number of contributors increased again in 1989. Also, many have continued contributing an amount each month or one or more times this last year as they have for several years in the past. We receive no public funding.

**A SPECIAL THANKS TO FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS. INDIVIDUAL AND CHURCH CONTRIBUTIONS MAKE VORP POSSIBLE.**

Cash income in 1989 for Fresno County VORP was all from private individuals and churches and amounted to \$35,572. The College Community Mennonite Brethren Church donates space for our office. Pacific Printing has donated our printing for our brochure, bulletin insert, letter head, envelopes, and business cards. Perhaps the most crucial issue in the life of VORP at this point is funding. I sincerely thank all of you who have joined in this effort to work at justice and reconciliation in our community.

SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE: Below is a letter from Judge Austin, Fresno County Superior Court - Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court. I hope his letter will be an encouragement to nudge some of you, who have been interested but have not yet become involved, to either become a trained mediator or a financial contributor or both. As you can see from his letter, both the need and opportunity to expand our service is there. The question is only if there will be enough people willing to get involved.