



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
July 1990

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• Vision: Mystical and Practical

by Ron Claassen
VORP of Central Valley, California

When we think of vision or visionary we may think of something or someone utopian: something that doesn't exist or someone who may be considered a bit (or a lot) out of touch with reality.

A vision is something that doesn't yet exist and is currently seen only in our imagination. It is rooted in values, spirit, ideas, and ideals. In our imagination we see images of people, programs, interactions, and procedures which incorporate these values and ideals. A vision is a desired state for the future. It is more intuition than linear thinking.

People and programs that don't have vision will likely find themselves floundering about flitting from here to there, or getting stuck in a rut. Vision gives us freedom to wander about, experiment, make changes with less fear or threat. We can do this because we test our changes against our vision: Is this change moving us in the direction of our vision? Our visions need to permeate all of our lives and programs.

Vision doesn't start in committee. However, a vision that is not available and open to examination and is not influenced by others is likely to be problematic. "Trust me" is not enough. We must be willing to work at conveying the vision.

Yet it is very difficult to articulate the whole picture because a vision incorporates motivations, spirit and values. Life experiences and/or demonstrations are essential.

Our visual image of our vision change as we gain new insights and as reality around us changes. Yet some of the core values are not likely to change. Justice and peace are core values in my vision but my visual images change as I gain new insights through exposure or life experience.

Vision is more than just a dream. It is that image of our desired state of affairs that reaches all the way back to our current action.

One concern I have is that we might think that vision is only for certain people or for certain kinds of programs. Vision is desirable for all individuals and groups. Part of my vision is that all people and groups have a vision that incorporates love, justice, and peace.

One resource that I'd like to quote may seem unlikely to those involved in social action. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene in *Re-inventing the Corporation* (Warner Books, 1985) say "Only a company with a real mission or sense of purpose that comes out of an intuitive or spiritual dimension will capture people's hearts. And you must have people's hearts to inspire the hard work required to realize a vision."

It is vision that both motivates us to do something and guides us along the way. •

The life and teachings of Jesus make it clear that God wants to be reconciled with us and for us to search for ways to be reconciled with both friends (when the differences begin to divide us) and enemies. I find it helpful to think of reconciliation as movement along the continuum from hostility toward caring. It is God's vision of reconciliation that motivates and guides us (staff, mediators, financial contributors and referral sources) in making VORP available to victims and offenders.

David Janzen is motivated and guided by this vision. He serves as a volunteer mediator also helps us keep our financial records in order. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

When I first met with Glen and his father, I was quite happy to see how eager both were to make things right with the victims. Two months earlier, Glen and a friend had gone through the parking lot of a local shopping mall, tearing hood ornaments off of several cars. One of those cars belonged to Beth and one to Robert. After meeting with Robert and hearing how eager he was to meet with the offender, I was beginning to expect a very smooth time getting to the joint meeting. Then I met Beth.

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Beth's initial reaction to the idea of meeting with Glen was that she simply did not have the time, and didn't care to make the time. She was understandably angry and frustrated. She had been inconvenienced enough as it was. He could send a check to her in the mail. Given Glen's willingness to meet and to pay restitution, that would probably have been easy enough to arrange. As a mediator, though, I have seen that reconciliation is not just a matter of an offender paying money to a victim. It also involves two people talking face to face, listening to each other, and hearing that what happened will not happen again. I didn't want to coerce Beth to participate but I hoped she might reconsider. I explained that we are not just a collection agency and that she was quite free to go through the regular court channels to get the restitution but that I hoped she would reconsider. She hesitantly agreed to meet with Glen, his parents, and Robert.

In short, I think the success of the meeting was summed up in the way Beth's attitudes changed. Here was a person whom, just two days ago, thought Glen should be thrown in juvenile hall for a while to "teach him a lesson." The boy she met, however, wasn't the terrible person she had envisioned, but rather one whom, more than anything else, needed to hear first hand about the pain and inconvenience he had caused. Over and over again (actually, I counted 5 times!) Beth told Glen what a "fine boy" he was, and that he just had to make sure that he made the right choices. Glen listened. Toward the end of the meeting, Glen's father wrote out checks for both Robert and Beth and Glen gave it to them with assurance that he would pay it back to his father from a part-time job he had just recently started.

For Beth, though, what was initially her primary concern, to receive restitution, was quite obviously overshadowed by the reconciliation that occurred between them. As a mediator, it is something that is so exciting to see happen. The way of Christ truly is the way of reconciliation.

Thanks David!!

Our next mediator training sessions are August 2 and 9. It is only as more mediators take cases that more victims and offenders have the possibility of ending the crime event with both being restored rather than distance and anger. Call Shannon or Elaine for details.

Your financial support is essential. We depend on it. We are committed to keeping our budget as low as possible and being as efficient as possible. If part of your vision is to help reduce the hostility in our world a little and encourage reconciliation, please consider giving a portion of your donations to VORP.

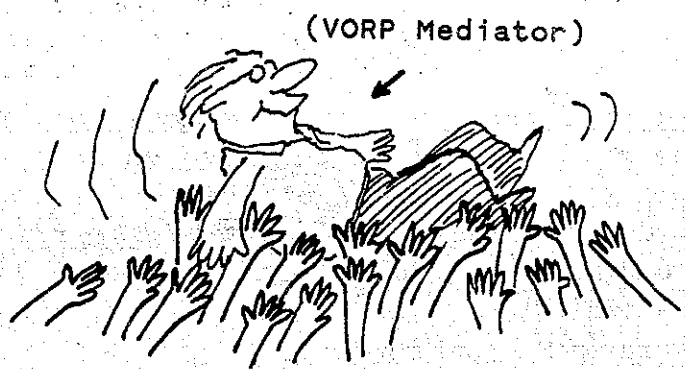
Our staff are young recent college graduates who volunteer to live on a subsistence allowance in order to help out our program for a year or two. This means we have a very energetic, dedicated, and high quality staff and also means we are frequently saying hello and goodbye. This is one of those months. Shannon Jost from Aurora, Nebraska and Rudy Dyck from Winnipeg, Manitoba will be ending their terms with VORP. Shannon will be starting a new voluntary service term with the Fresno Pacific College Center for Conflict Studies and Peacemaking. Rudy will be returning to Winnipeg. Thank you Shannon and Rudy for your dedicated Christian service. We are very pleased to welcome Beth Holck from Peabody, Kansas.

I am employed two days per week for VORP. I will be continuing that however I will be consolidating my other mediating and consulting activities into my new position as Co-Director of the Fresno Pacific College Center for Conflict Studies and Peacemaking. Thanks for your continuing encouragement and support!!
Shalom, Ron Claassen

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MEDIATOR SUPPORT GROUP

Tuesday, July 24

7:00 pm

College Community Church
2529 Willow
Clovis, CA 93612
291-1120

The Mediator Support Group will be meeting monthly. This is an opportunity for you to meet with other mediators and VORP staff to discuss cases, ask questions, get feed back and learn more about VORP and reconciliation! We hope you can attend!

STAFF TRANSITIONS:

VORP's newest "recruit" is Beth Holck. She will be coming July 25th, through the Mennonite Voluntary Service program. Beth is from Peabody, Kansas and currently plans to be on the VORP staff for one year.

Rudy Dyck and Shannon Jost will be finishing their terms with VORP August 1st. Rudy plans to return to Winnipeg, Manitoba. Shannon will continue to volunteer through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service program, but will be working at the "Center for Conflict Studies and Peacemaking" at Fresno Pacific College.

But, fear not! There will still be a familiar face in the office. Elaine Enns will be here and will continue to keep VORP running!!

So far in 1990 we have not been taking as many referrals as we would like from the Probation Department, because we've been trying to get caught up on the back

log of cases. BUT! We are now planning to increase the number of referrals and we hope you will continue taking cases!!!

If you would like to pick up a case we would be more than happy to let you do so!! Or, if it would be more convenient to have us mail you one we would be more than happy to do that TOO!! The VORP office hours are "typically" Monday through Friday, 9am-5pm. (Occasionally we are out of the office doing case work, etc., so you may wish to call before you come. Our number is 291-1120.)

It is because of you VORP works! THANKS!!

One victim said in "Police" that "the FBI was not interested in the case" and that "the FBI was not interested in the case" and that "the FBI was not interested in the case".

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