

The United States leads the world in incarceration, according to a study by the Sentencing Project, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group that advocates sentencing alternatives to incarceration.

In the early years of VORP we used to say that the US was third in incarceration rate behind the Soviet Union and South Africa. That has changed. In the January 16, 1991 "Criminal Justice Newsletter" they quoted from the study that "the United States has 426 jail and prison inmates per 100,000 residents. The second-ranking nation, South Africa, incarcerates 333 per 100,000, followed by the Soviet Union, with 268 prisoners per 100,000. The United States' incarceration rate is four to ten times that of Great Britain, France, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, Italy, and Japan."

This is the result of a policy which focuses on attempting to change people through punishment and coercion. Ask anyone in the justice system, incarceration may prevent antisocial behavior for a period of time due to restraint but it does not change people. Our choice of prison as a primary way of responding to crime is preventing chaos but it is not producing shalom (peace as a result of right relationships).

The VORP process invites offenders to take responsible steps toward restoring both victims and themselves. Not all offenders will respond to such an invitation and unfortunately many are not offered the option because there simply are not enough trained VORP mediators. But many offenders and victims could benefit from the VORP process.

VORP Goals Of Restoration Are Being Accomplished

Our story this month shows that this goal (restoring victims who are harmed by criminal acts and empowering offenders to become productive, cooperative participants in our society) can be accomplished. The story comes from Ed Barton, a long time mediator with VORP, teacher at Roosevelt High School, and member of the Presbyterian Church in Sanger. Some names and details have been changed to protect identities.

Tommy (11 years) and John (12 years) were at the river near a bridge just enjoying shooting their pellet guns at trees, birds and other targets.

John had an idea to shoot at cars passing over the bridge, never thinking of the harm this might cause. The boys had shot at a total of 20 cars.

Three of the drivers reported damage to their cars. The good work of the Sheriff's Department finally found the boys.

As I met with each offender and his parents it was evident that they all wanted to participate in the VORP process and make things right with their victims.

This incident had put a damper on Tommy's birthday and Christmas for both families.

I met with each of the three victims and heard their stories.

Mrs. Randolph was on her way home to Fresno and was extremely frightened when her front windshield was hit and broken.

Miss Rider, a young lady in her 20's, was driving with her mother in the passengers seat when a loud noise surprised her. When she stopped to see what had happened she looked back and saw what looked like two men in all black clothes. The fear intensified when she saw that the object that hit the car had narrowly missed the window next to her mother. Fortunately it hit the door and stopped. As she quickly got into her car and left her fear turned to great anger as she thought about how mother could have been hurt. She added that since the incident she never takes this same route to

Sixth Annual VORP Gathering

We are looking forward to seeing you April 11 at our Sixth Annual VORP Gathering. Call Beth or Elaine to make your reservations to help us prepare adequate space. Dr. David Augsburg, nationally known author and speaker and currently Professor of Pastoral Care at Fuller Theological Seminary, will be speaking to us on the theme of "How are we going to respond to our nation's crime problem - allout war, forgiveness, retribution, reconciliation, enforcement, negotiation? And, what is VORPs role?"

her job but takes an alternate (longer) route for fear of a recurrence.

Mr. Solis was driving with his two daughters ages 8 and 12. He heard a loud noise, puzzled and frightened he pulled his car over to the side of the road and examined the car. The rear windshield had been shattered and pieces of the glass had hit his oldest daughter in the back seat. She wasn't injured but he became extremely frightened at the thought that his daughter could have been hurt. He got in his car turned around and sped home.

All victims agreed to a joint meeting.

The meeting was tense at the beginning. The victims were angry. The offenders were scared.

As the offenders told their stories and apologized for what they had done, the tension in the room began to ease.

As the victims each told their story, they were able to freely express their experiences including fears, anger, inconvenience, and costs of repairing their cars.

The offenders each assured the victims that this would never happen again and agreed to share in repaying the out of pocket costs for repairs which totaled \$470.00 on the three cars.

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When we completed VORP process, there were pleasant exchanges and handshakes between the offenders and victims and families.

The looks on the peoples faces conveyed a peace and relief that this terrible situation had been resolved.

As people were leaving, out of curiosity, I asked Miss Rider if she thought she might once again try using her original route to work. She thought a second, smiled and said, "I probably will."

What a great feeling for me to be involved in seeing victims healed of the fear of unknown and mysterious offenders, and to walk away with confidence that this will not happen again to them at the hands of these offenders.

It was an equally great feeling to see two young offenders walk away being healed of the guilt and stigma of being offenders, because they had faced their victims and made things right with them and were forgiven.

Thanks Ed!

You too could facilitate a meeting like this. The next training is scheduled for April 23 and 30. The training is \$7.50 (materials costs) for those who plan to take cases as volunteer mediators. The cost is \$75 for those who are interested in learning the skills of a VORP mediator for use in other settings. Call Elaine or Beth for details or for a presentation to your Church, Sunday School, Service Group, etc. or to schedule a training at your church.

Thanks for your contributions. VORP relies entirely on your donations. Your regular monthly contributions provide training and staff support for the volunteer mediators. If you haven't yet made VORP part of your monthly contributions, this is a good month to start (perhaps \$10 - \$20 per month). Thanks for your consideration.

Shalom,

Ron Claassen

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