

## *Carla's Story: A Victim Ministry Testimony*

Carla was apprehensive as she prepared to meet her Victim Ministry volunteer for the very first time.

After receiving court advocacy assistance and crisis counseling from Crime Victim Services in Putnam County, Ohio, she was introduced to the Victim Ministry program by her Victim Advocate, Erin Recker. Norma Gable was assigned to Carla as her volunteer for long term support and follow-up, and May 20 was to be their first face-to-face meeting.

Victim Ministry of Crime Victim Services was begun for Allen and Putnam Counties (Ohio) in 1992 and is the first program in the nation to have paid and volunteer staff within a victim assistance agency providing Christian support to victims of crime. Volunteers are able to provide emotional, spiritual, practical and financial assistance, as well as to create a safe place for victims to share their grief and loss with someone offering compassionate listening and meaningful pastoral conversation.

Norma phoned Carla on May 8, introducing herself as the Victim Ministry Volunteer. "Her first response was one of excitement and even a sigh of relief," says Norma of their first conversation. They continued to speak several times over the phone about the violence Carla had experienced, but had never actually met until now.

Carla agreed that Norma would pick her up at her home and accompany her to Wal-Mart for coffee. Carla was initially quiet and wasn't even sure what to say to Norma. On their way to Wal-Mart, they stopped at a local Dollar General store to do some shopping. When Norma went to pay for her purchases, she was embarrassed to realize that she had no money. Carla laughed and paid for her purchase, thankful that she could also help this person who was sent to help her. From that moment on, Carla and Norma became fast friends.

Though Victim Ministry was the bridge to the formation of their friendship, the presence of God and sharing of scriptures entered very gradually into their

conversations. Norma didn't ask questions, choosing instead to simply offer to pray for Carla. When asked of her initial perceptions of Carla, Norma explains, "I just felt Carla wanted what everyone wants- love and acceptance."

Several months into their friendship, Norma and Carla began talking more about spiritual issues. When Norma spoke of her church, she sensed that she had sparked Carla's interest. Norma took that opportunity to invite Carla to her church, and the door to Christian conversation was opened.

As the weeks passed, Norma accompanied Carla to court since she had virtually no other source of support and encouragement. They continued to talk often on the phone, gaining confidence in each other and sharing stories of family life. Norma even helped Carla study for her driver's license test.

Since the day of their first face-to-face meeting the women continued to enjoy a close relationship. Today they enjoy spending time chatting, shopping and attending church services and seminars together. A sense of trust has blossomed between them, allowing Carla to share stories of past pain and victimization. More recently she has been able to share stories of success and happiness in her life.

Carla is especially thankful to have Norma as a friend and confidant. "She's always there to lend me a hand or a shoulder to cry on." Their relationship has grown into one of mutual respect and understanding. Norma feels comfortable enough in their friendship to share her own personal thoughts and feelings with Carla, as well as scripture and prayer. Says Carla, "Norma has a heart for everyone."

Nearly a year and a half after their first meeting, Norma had the distinct pleasure of attending Carla's wedding to her former husband. "The wedding was absolutely beautiful," says Norma. "The presence of God was there."



Carla (right) with Victim Ministry friend Norma