

# SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Ten, Number Four

— A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers — presented by the people who bring you *Connections* —

## Holding On and Letting Go

by Tiffany Kingham

S.M.A. Lay Missionaries

After living in a small, rural village in Ghana for two years, returning to Washington, D.C. was quite a shock, to say the least. Two weeks before I was scheduled to return to the U.S., I dislocated my knee playing in a soccer tournament for the local parish. I had to leave the village abruptly to return to the States for medical treatment. With only one day to pack my things and say my goodbyes, I had no time for closure, no time to prepare my heart. I was on the plane and landing in the U.S. before I knew it. Somehow I kept myself together during the flight, but as soon as I was by myself, I absolutely lost it. I just cried and cried and cried.

The next few months were filled with a lot of mixed emotions and struggling to discern God's will. I missed Africa like crazy and remember feeling like I had left my heart there and it was only my physical body that was here. I would go to places that were familiar to me here in D.C. but would still feel

like I was an alien from another planet. I reconnected with family and old friends, but still, nobody really knew or understood where I was coming from. How could they? I was back in the U.S., but my heart and spirit yearned for Africa... every day.

After much thought and prayer, I decided to return to Ghana for another two years. It just didn't feel like it was time for me to be in the States yet. Unfortunately, the mission site in the village where I had been previously stationed had been closed after I left, so it was not an option to return to my former "home." However, God blessed me with a wonderful new placement working with lepers in the capital city of Accra, and, at times, I was able to visit my friends in the village.

Just as with the people in the village, the relationships I developed with the lepers were very deep and meaningful. Our time together brought me so much joy! I knew it was going to be hard to leave! There were so many precious moments and times of sharing, really being present to one another. There were times of rejoicing - times to sing, dance, and laugh

**"I was back in the U.S., but my heart and spirit yearned for Africa.. every day."**

*'Holding on and Letting Go' continued on page 3*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Congratulations on the near completion of your volunteer commitment! As you approach your next steps, how are you dealing with "holding on" and "letting go?" Inside, check out some different ideas about coping with this big transition.

Former volunteers, Tiffany and Gary, share stories from the time when they had to pack their bags and say their goodbyes to friends, fellow volunteers and co-workers.....pp. 1-3  
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## "Finishing the Now"

by Gary Adler

Capuchin Franciscan Volunteer Corps

"What are you doing after you're done volunteering?" "Are you going to get a real job?" "What comes next?" I have found a time-tested answer that will throw off any person who asks these questions. Simply reply by saying (with a smile), "I plan to follow my universal vocation of filling the world with love." It's true, right?

Despite believing the truth of this reply, the members of my volunteer community struggled with the practical issues of "what next" and

the emotions of finishing the "now." After spending 12 months as an Activities Coordinator planning for homeless men,

I faced a multitude of emotions. I was tired of my position and wanted to move on, sensing upcoming relief. I had a strong sense that I had skills which I had not used in my position. I knew these skills lay untapped, that I needed to use them to know God and work for God, but didn't know how. I felt the impending separation

**"...I needed to use [these skills] to know God and work for God, but I didn't know how."**

*'Finishing the Now' continued on page 2*



of community members I had grown to love (though I wasn't good at telling them my feelings for them).

With all this swirling in my mind and body at once, those big questions developed into what I term the "tyranny of plans:" the ability of an undecided future to reign as a tyrant over the activities of the present. It coursed through all my thoughts, quiet moments, prayers, and journal entries. The "tyranny of plans" is that anxiety we beg God to forgive during Mass when we say "and free us from all anxiety." The tyranny of plans blocked me from seeing multiple, possible routes. I seemed like the fishermen (later, the apostles) who fished one side of the boat like crazy, before being told to simply try fishing the other side of the boat.

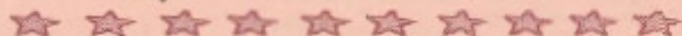
Sometime during January, the evidence that I was stuck in a rut piled up: the graduate school applications remained uncompleted and the potential job opportunities became as appealing as cleaning my roommates' bathroom. I had figured that there might be another option; what I didn't know is that all I had to do was agree to try another way. I knew I wanted to learn Spanish as well as continue exploring issues that I focused on as a volunteer. Eventually, I decided to go to Guatemala to study and live. Some of my community members did differently, ploughing through the "tyranny" or sidestepping it



### A Sweet So-Long

#### ★ Create-a-Cookie Awards Ceremony ★

Try the yummy sugar cookie recipe below to make star cookies for everyone in your community. Each person's "award" star is decided and decorated by the rest of the community (e.g., funniest moment, most memorable moment, etc.). Or, make a batch of "award" cookies for your co-workers to show them how much you appreciate the gifts, funny moments and time they shared with you. If you don't have a star-cutter, use any circular shaped object to cut out award "medals!"



#### SUGAR COOKIES:

**Ingredients:** 1 1/2 cups pwd. sugar, 1 cup butter or margarine, 1 egg, 1 tsp vanilla, 1/2 tsp almond flavoring, 2 1/2 cups flour, 1 tsp baking soda, 1 tsp cream of tartar.

**Preparation:** Mix pwd. sugar and butter into a cream. Let sit until soft (or microwave very briefly to soften more quickly). Mix in egg, vanilla and almond flavoring thoroughly. In a separate bowl, mix flour, baking soda, and cream of tartar. Blend everything together. Refrigerate for 2-3 hours. Divide dough in half. Roll one half 3/16" thick onto lightly floured surface. Repeat for other half. Cut individual cookies with cookie cutter of your choice. Place cookies on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake 7-8 minutes (or until delicately golden) at 350 degrees. Now decorate!



completely. However, we all reached a certain point—an equilibrium between having a way to go in the future and living in the mystery of future possibilities.

Having reached this equilibrium, we freed ourselves to spend the last months being present to each other. We spent more time together. We seemed to share more in prayer. We became more open, even sharing painful memories and feelings about our experience. The impending separation reminded us of how we had come together. The flow of our community life seemed like the sacramental life of the church. We had been baptized together into a new life in August. Sometime in October, we had to learn to reconcile ourselves with each other, in order to forgive mistakes. By Christmas, through sharing gifts, food, and prayer we communed as the body of Christ. And now, as August neared with anxieties set aside, we prepared for the end of the year, a very real "death." We sat on the porch and cried a bit, doing what any community does. Then, I got in the car, pulled away, cried a bit, and left to explore the "answers" to all those questions that had unnerved me just a few months prior. ✦

*"...we freed ourselves to spend the last months being present to each other. We became more open, even sharing painful memories and feelings about our experience."*

### Questions for Gary's article:

- ☞ Sometimes volunteer and mission placements use only a fraction of one's competencies. Which of your skills do you feel were well used and which, like Gary's, were untapped? What are your reactions to this realization and its implications for your future?
- ☞ The flow of Gary's community life paralleled certain sacramental moments of birth, forgiveness, communion and the final anointing (commissioning). If you were to describe the key moments in the flow of your community's life, which metaphors or symbolic images would seem appropriate?
- ☞ Once Gary's community members had come to terms with their post service plans, each in his/her own way, they felt freer to enjoy the remaining time together without angst. What are some ways you and your community can more fully enjoy the present moment without allowing future challenges to distract you?
- ☞ Gary likened his community's goodbye to a sense of death or loss. If you feel this way, what are some strategies you can use to smooth the transition and help each other to adjust within your community? At your workplace?
- ☞ Eventually, Gary found an equilibrium between making a plan for himself and allowing for the mystery of his future to unfold before him. Listen to your own heart. What do you truly desire to do when you finish your term of service? What motivates you (e.g., finances, faith, others' expectations, personal satisfaction)? What steps can you take now toward your goals?



together. There were times to pray together, times to mourn together, to talk and to listen, to teach and to learn...times to just BE together and not do a single thing! It was difficult to imagine not having my friends at the leprosy center as part of my everyday life.

As my departure drew closer, I found myself really appreciating and cherishing each moment I had with the lepers, and just feeling very thankful for all of the time I had been able to spend in Ghana. I felt sad that I was leaving, but in my heart I felt like it was time for me to return to the States. I took time to share my feelings with people and express to them how much our time together had meant to me.

***"I am trying to hold onto what I experienced there and make a conscious effort to incorporate it into my daily life."***

Spending extra prayer time by myself and with others was also an important part of preparing my heart to leave Africa.

There are some sentiments that can only be expressed through tears. I remember my farewell party with the lepers and how overwhelmed I was. I felt so blessed to have had such a wonderful experience with them and so sad to have to say goodbye; I was almost speechless. There were no words to capture what I was feeling and tears just streamed down my face as I was sitting in their midst.

When words did come, I told them that they will always be in my heart and prayers and that yes, I would definitely be back to visit. I really do believe that our relationships with those we care about deeply can be kept alive in our hearts, regardless of the physical distance that may be between us. Even today, a year later, I feel so close to the lepers in heart and spirit that it's almost as if I can reach out and touch them! I do keep in touch by writing letters and I do

pray for them often. And its funny, they also come to me vividly in my dreams, which is great!

The transition back to the States hasn't been easy for me. There are many days when I wish I were back in Ghana and I yearn for the simplicity of the lifestyle and the warmth and vibrant spirits of the people. I miss dancing with the dance troupe and going to the farm with my friends in the village. I miss sitting around a fire at night and sharing stories until way after dark!

I am trying to hold onto what I experienced there and make a conscious effort to incorporate it into my daily life. For me that means spending time in nature, really being present to people, and appreciating the simple things in life. It means making an effort to stay in touch with friends in Ghana and sharing my experiences there with people here. I try to go to African cultural events whenever I can. I am still trying to find a drumming teacher so I can continue drumming! Visiting Ghanaian friends that I have met in D.C. is helpful, as well as talking with other people who have lived overseas and can relate to culture shock and the process of re-entry when returning to the U.S.

It's still a tough journey though, and there are times when I feel isolated and alone. Sometimes I just have to sit with God and allow Him to be my comfort. My experiences in Ghana and the friends that I made there will always be a part of me. In an instant I can draw near to them in thought, heart, and spirit. And, of course, knowing that I will return to visit one day soon in person is also a great joy and comfort to my heart! ✦

## Letting Go

*To let go doesn't mean to stop caring; it means I can't do it for someone else.*

*To let go is not to cut myself off;*

*it's the realization that I can't control another.*

*To let go is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences. To let go is not to try to change*

*or blame another; I can only change myself. To let go is*

*not to care for, but to care about. To let go is not to fix,*

*but to be supportive. To let go is not*

*to judge, but to allow another to*

*be a human being. To let go is*

*not to adjust everything to*

*my desires, but to take*

*each day as it comes.*

*To let go is not to*

*regret the past, but to*

*grow and live for the*

*future. To let go is to*

*fear less and to*

*love more!*

*Author  
unknown*

### Questions for Tiffany's Article:

- In what ways are you preparing your heart for your departure?
- As Tiffany's time in Accra drew to a close, she found herself appreciating, cherishing, and feeling thankful for each moment with the lepers. What are your feelings or attitudes toward those at your volunteer placement as your time of service nears an end? Consider expressing to others the way you are feeling about leaving.
- How can you use prayer as one method of preparing to leave your service site? How can prayer help you find a healthy balance between letting go and holding on?
- Tiffany's last few weeks of her first Ghana experience were suddenly cut short because of her soccer injury and subsequent emergency return to the United States. She did not have the chance to say her goodbyes. Imagine that you had a similar departure: which goodbyes would you miss the most?
- Sometimes former volunteers/missioners are surprised at how difficult it can be to re-connect with family and friends back home. What are some important ways in which you've been changed during your term of service? Brainstorm ways you can share these growth experiences or value shifts with your family and friends.



# Tell Us What You Want, What You Really, Really Want!



Transitions can be *scary*,  
so why not *baby* yourself?  
Be a good *sport* and you'll have  
a *posh* journey to your  
future job and new setting!



*But seriously...*

Finishing up a volunteer experience and moving on can be difficult. Knowing what to do and/or where to go often isn't clear. One possible way to help smooth the transition is to take stock of what has been important to you *during your time of service*.

Try looking at these three areas, your: **skills, values, and growth**.  
By yourself or by sharing in a group, answer the questions below.  
Use what you discover to help invest yourself in your next setting.

One alternative method is to answer some of the questions for others in your community, e.g., "I've noticed you're very skillful at ...." If you don't live in a community environment, consider answering the questions with a friend or co-worker.

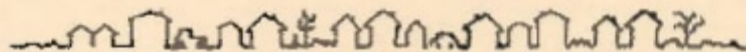
**Skills:** In my current work setting, which skills have I most enjoyed using? Which are the three strongest skills I have for future employment? How would my current co-workers answer this "strongest skills" question about me? (Try asking them.)

**Values:** What has been important to me this past year? To what values, issues or concerns have my eyes been opened? What have I participated in that gave me a sense of meaning or purpose? When I leave my current position, which values will I *really, really* want to take with me?

**Growth:** During this past year, what aspects of my life (e.g., personal, professional, spiritual) have I neglected? This year, what could I have done differently to have made it more hope-filled? growth-filled? In what directions do I want to expand myself in the future?

.....

If you are staying in the geographic area where you volunteered, what plans have you made to stay connected? To what? To whom?







# "It Did For That One"



Have you ever heard the story about the child walking along the beach, throwing back into the ocean each starfish she found? An adult comes along and asks the child, "Little one, what are you doing? Don't you see that there are too many starfish on the beach? You'll never be able to return them all to the sea, and tomorrow, there will just be more washed ashore! You're just wasting your time; *what you're doing won't matter!*" The small child paused and, as she threw another starfish back into the water, said, "*It did for that one.*"

The problems and situations you faced this year may seem so large that it is hard to see how you may have made a difference. If you touched just one person's life, if you gave even one child the experience of being loved, your time of service was worthwhile. Now that you've been serving others, what seems different in yourself? In those around you? In the situation you encountered upon your arrival?

**Gather as a community (or create some quiet space on your own).**

★ Share with one another (or journal alone) about ways you, as an individual or a group, made a difference in someone's life and/or in your community during the past year (e.g., with a housemate, child, client, parishioner, friend, co-worker; in your local community, parish, workplace, etc.).

★ On a large sheet of paper make a list or use symbols to depict your ideas about these differences you have seen. Display your creation where you can enjoy it for the remainder of your volunteer time.

**A look in the mirror:**

Discuss with community members or co-workers some ways you have changed during your volunteer/mission service. Who has had an impact on your life this year? Spend time reflecting on the differences you feel in yourself and the gifts you have received.

## Are you finishing up your volunteer program?

### Don't know where to START?

Ask your volunteer program for a copy of this year's "What's Next?" Notebook.

This Notebook helps guide your transition after volunteer service, with suggestions for whichever next steps you may be taking! If your program doesn't have a copy, they can contact our office and we'll mail them one right away for duplicating and distributing!



### Need a JOB?

Sign up to receive the Pallotti Center's free job listings from our Job Bank for former volunteers. Contact Alice Hogan at the address, email or phone numbers listed below to receive a monthly job packet for the areas where you are searching for employment.

## Looking for SUPPORT when you move?

Join the Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners! Already, 700 "formers" have agreed to be available for people like YOU! Whether you are moving to a new area or going home, meet formers who live there and who may be interested in helping people like yourself find employment or affordable areas to live, or getting together for social and spiritual activities! Call or write another former in your new area... someone who has already been through this transition. Ask if your program participates and, if so, request a form from them to obtain a list of formers in your area.



## Want to STAY CONNECTED to this experience?

Staying Connected is our free publication specifically for "former" volunteers to stay in touch with the values and ideas encountered during volunteer service. We hope Staying Connected will help bring former volunteers together, serving as an impetus for personal growth and spiritual reflection and as a forum for discussion. Sign up now for this free publication!



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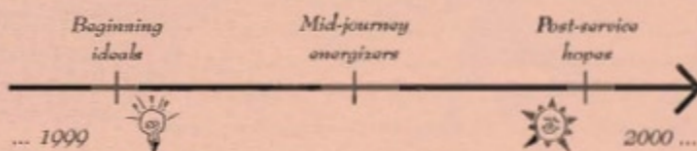


## Biblical Reflection: What Are the Sources of Your Spiritual Energy?



In the Christian Scriptures, the book of Acts (of the Apostles) tells the marvelous story of the spread of Christ's gospel from the Church's birthday on Pentecost Sunday in Jerusalem (ch: 2) to Paul's conversion (ch:9) and his ultimate imprisonment in Rome (ch: 28), three decades later. The focus of Acts is on how, throughout these events, the Spirit empowered Peter, Paul and all the disciples. Review the stories if your memory is fuzzy.

All Christians, but perhaps especially volunteers and missionaries during their time of service, experience many spiritual empowerments: re-births, imprisonments, great escapes, supportive friendships, sharing their "gospels," and personal conversions. Draw a time-line of this past year (perhaps, making a variation of the one below), marking times when, in various ways, you felt spiritually challenged or empowered. Share your own "Acts" with a friend.



## Shared Visions

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### The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center:

To promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church. Our goal is to support lay volunteers before, during and after their term of service. Local Pallotti Centers are located in Boston, Paterson, NJ, St. Louis and Sacramento. The National Office is in Washington, DC.

The Centers take their inspiration from Saint Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) who believed passionately in the laity, in each person as being an image of God and as called to be missionary.

*Shared Visions' goal is to explore five building blocks of spiritual development: Intellectual Growth, Emotional and Physical Health, Leadership and Prayer.*



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