

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Eleven, Number Three

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

A Snow Day

by Elizabeth Kunz
Good Shepherd Volunteers

This winter was long, and in the darkness of the March mornings, I longed to see the shadows earlier and see the hand on my thermometer glide towards a higher mark. It seemed to be a bull's eye every morning this week, exactly thirty degrees Fahrenheit. It was still cold, but not cold enough to threaten a snow day. Each morning when my alarm went off, my heartbeat quickened with the possibility that my small school of forty-five inner-city girls would close its doors, giving me a day of calmness within the storm that seemed to surge everywhere I turned. I prayed for snow every morning. It was the only thing that filled me with the virtue of hope.

Every day I was giving more than I felt I possessed. The young girls at my middle school, so often emotionally abandoned, disrespected, and materially poor, were in need of mountains of love and attention. I was overwhelmed by the tasks of planning after school activities and a summer camp,

teaching without any training, and counseling angry and depressed girls. Conflict dominated not only the students, but also the staff. The director and the principal were at odds over how the school should be run and by March, the entire staff had decided to resign for the following year.

No one seemed to have the time to give me guidance or thank me for my work. On the home front, my community mate was young and away from home for the first time. I felt as though I was expected to be a surrogate mom not only for my emotionally abandoned students, but also for her.

I live to give; that is why I had embarked on a year of volunteer service. I had come to New Jersey with high hopes of releasing captives, healing the blind, and raising up the oppressed. I knew the task would be hard, but I did not expect it to be so physically and emotionally draining. I wasn't sure this

"I knew the task would be hard, but I did not expect it to be so physically and spiritually draining. I wasn't sure this volunteer year would ever end."

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Happy spring greetings volunteers and missionaries serving around the U.S. and the globe! We present this issue of *Shared Visions* with hopes that you & your fellow volunteers rejuvenate yourselves by facing new challenges, re-focusing your energies & growing in new ways.

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An Experience in Patience and Presence

by Doug Scott
Capuchin Franciscan Volunteer Corps, Midwest

I left for Nicaragua in August, 1998. A few days before leaving, as I was winding up my orientation with the Cap Corps Midwest program, I reflected on what had brought me to lay missionary work. Going back a year before, I had made a decision to hold off any job opportunities after graduation because I wanted to experience the challenge, both the joys and pains, of being a missionary. Looking back now, it was one of the best decisions I have ever made...but I don't want to get ahead of myself and tell you about the end before I mention the juicy middle. During my year and a half in Nicaragua, I experienced a profound "metanoia," a conversion. I wrestled with quite a few devils such as loneliness, initial depression, confusion, embarrassments, and feelings of inadequacy. I see now that God was there all along, guiding and purifying me through the tough times. He gave me support from community and deep friendships that balanced my dark nights of the soul. Most of all, God emptied my cup so I could be open to

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a new culture, new ways of thinking and living, and new concepts of spirituality. Let me explain that a bit more.

My first few weeks in Nicaragua were pretty tough. I lived in a small village on the Atlantic coast and I felt pretty isolated. I can remember coming home from teaching English to rooms full of loud and crazy students whom I did not understand. When I would leave for home my shirts were soaked in sweat due to the heat and stress. I would make my way into the church and pray in front of the tabernacle, giving thanks that I had survived another day, but also asking for strength. Gradually though, depression set in, and I felt that I should

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return home to the U.S. I prayed for a sign for whether I should stay or go, and I waited for an answer to my prayers.

We had a retreat for teachers and, at the beginning, we were given a piece of paper that contained one of the gifts or fruits of the Holy Spirit. I arrived late and there was only one paper left. It read, "Paciencia", patience. Then at the end of the retreat, we were given another little piece

of paper in the shape of a flame that contained one of the gifts or fruits.

As the nun was passing them out, she dropped one of the flames in front of me accidentally and was about to give me another when I reached down and turned the paper over and noticed what it said. Yes, there right in front of me, for the second time, was written, "Paciencia." I thought, "Could you be any more clear, God?" I did not want to stay, but how could I turn my eyes away from a clear answer to my prayer for a sign? God wanted me to have patience with His plan, and most of all, have patience while being gentle with myself. He needed to teach me a lot about life through this missionary experience, and if I left, I would be losing a very important opportunity.

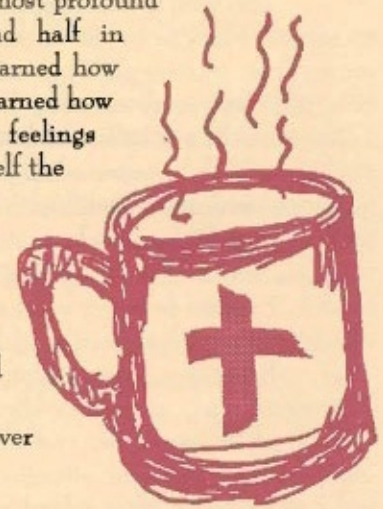
One reason why my cup was so full when I came to Nicaragua was because I felt that I knew my faith well; I read a lot about Catholic Apologetics and I knew how to defend it. One of my goals was to teach the faith to others. I soon learned that I saw my faith from a paradigm of blacks and whites, rights and wrongs. When I was taken out of my context and put into another culture, language, and belief system, things stopped making sense. It was then that I really began to look at my faith from a new perspective. In my case, I felt depressed, and I was in a spiritual drought until I learned something really important: the concept of presence.

I began to realize that being a missionary did not necessarily mean teaching about the faith (even though I did do some of that); it did not mean I had to be perfect (which I certainly was not); but, what it did mean was that I said "yes" to opportunities to share my presence with others. Being a missionary did mean saying "yes" to invitations to eat dinner at someone's house. It meant representing the Church in

meetings. It meant sitting for hours with a family who just lost a loved one. It meant being faithful to my commitment to the youth choir, even though there were a few times I did not want to be there. Being a missionary meant a million and one different things, but they all had to do with living fully in the present moment and being fully present to others. From this I learned how to quit seeing myself as a stranger and allow myself to be embraced by the community, to be in solidarity with them, insofar as I was called. So, my second wind and my strength to finish the most intense experience of my life, both in terms of deep joys and deep pains, came as a change from seeing myself as a "doer", to seeing myself as a "be-er". "Just be" (Nike has it all wrong ☺). My prayer life also began to change. I quit being so vocal in prayer, saying or thinking words to express my feelings and thoughts to God. Instead, I just sat there in silence, being open, not saying or thinking anything. Then when I finished, I just said, "thanks." Pretty simple, I know, but God was emptying my cup.

I would sum up my most profound lessons during the year and half in Nicaragua by saying that I learned how to be patient with myself. I learned how to accept my limitations and feelings of inadequacy, and I gave myself the chance to really be open to the present moment. That allowed me to more fully share in each moment with others in the community, and through community, God filled my cup.

God bless you wherever you are! +



Questions for Doug's article:

- Volunteers often begin their experience with their cups full of expectations, hopes and other pre-conceived ideas. What was your cup filled with when you began volunteering? How has God and/or others transformed you and your hopes and expectations during your time as a volunteer?
- Reflecting on your past experiences, when have you said yes to an opportunity to share your presence with others? Share with others some of the times that you are proud to have responded 'yes.'
- After Easter, many volunteers experience a need for rejuvenation. In what ways could you be more present in the different areas of your volunteer experience (job, community, prayer life, other), and how could that rejuvenate you?
- Doug mentioned praying for a sign from God. In what ways does God answer your prayers or give you signs?
- To Doug, being a missionary meant many things, but most importantly, it meant being present to others. What does "being a missionary" mean to you?

volunteer year would ever end. Most of my family members and friends encouraged me to leave my volunteer placement because of the difficulties. I knew that God was not calling me to quit, but I was being drained like a swimming pool in preparation for winter. Spring was supposed to be coming and spring meant hope. Where was the hope in this situation?

Hope came in the form of a retreat. Early in April, my volunteer organization held one of their scheduled retreats - this one focused around spirituality. The retreat was silent except for

"I began to realize that there were many ways I was a captive, oppressed by my own need to always be doing for others."

scheduled discussion times and meal times. Not being a big talker, I didn't think the experience would be very radical for me. The first day of the retreat was one of those spring days that made the thermometer rise well above its bull's eye - to nearly seventy degrees! I spent my day with my journal, basking like a lizard in the sun. I enjoyed the sun, but I found the silence to be almost uncomfortable. Wasn't there something I was suppose to be doing? Wasn't there someone who needed my energy and attention? It hit me like an apple falling from a tree - I was the one that needed my energy and attention. On retreat, my obligations were suddenly not about nurturing others, but about nurturing myself. I began to realize that there were many ways I was a captive, oppressed by my own need to always be doing for others. I noticed how my shoulders were constantly tense and I always had a headache. I began to let myself relax, to forget about

my students, my boss, my roommate, and focus on myself for awhile.

That evening we had an all-night vigil in which we took turns praying and keeping watch with our Lord. I took the shift right before dawn. My alarm clock woke me at 4:30 a.m. and I dragged myself wearily across the lawn to the vigil space. The temperature had dropped significantly since the day before and I was glad that many candles were lit in the vigil space. As I sat next to the flickering candles watching the sky lighten, I noticed a peculiar quality to the sky. I quickly realized that it was snowing!

God had answered my prayers for snow, but not how I was expecting them to be answered. I was reminded that God's ways are not our ways. He had given me my snow as I sat open and prayerful before Him, letting myself be refueled by Him. "Yes, I hear you Lord," I thought to myself. "I need to take more snow days. I need to sit open and prayerful before you more often and that will be my calm within the storm."

It was up to me. I had to take time for myself. I needed to pray and focus some energy inwards every single day. I live to give, but I must also give to myself. I felt full of hope at that moment, hope that I could give myself a bit of a snow day... every day.

"I live to give, but I also must give to myself."



Spring-time Treat

Ice Cream Kolacky

Ingredients: 1 pt. vanilla ice cream, 3-1/2 Tbs. sugar, butter or margarine, 4 C flour, prepared fruit filling, jams or preserves. **Instructions:** Cream together softened ice cream, butter (or margarine) gradually adding sugar and flour. Refrigerate overnight. Roll on floured pastry board to 1/8 inch thickness. Cut into rounds or squares. Fill with fruit filling and overlap opposite corners, or make a well in the round or square and fill with jam, etc. Bake at 350 for 20 minutes, or until lightly browned. Cool. Sprinkle with powdered sugar. "They're delicious."

(The ice cream recipe above is from the *Andre House Book of Recipes & Household Hints*. Andre House serves meals to people in need in downtown Phoenix, AZ.)

"Hey volunteers, there are more great recipe ideas in the 'Current Volunteers' section of our website:

www.pallotticenter.org

We've posted recipe ideas from other volunteers from around the globe. You can submit your favorite recipes too, and we'll post them in our "Recipe of the Week" section!"



Questions for Elizabeth's article:

- Elizabeth faced challenges, both at the school where she worked and in her community. What challenges have you faced during the past year? How has your experience been more or less challenging than you expected it would be? Have those challenges led you to question your decision to volunteer?
- Sometimes people place too many expectations on a person. What is an expectation put on you by others, or by yourself, from which you would like to be free?
- The fresh perspective of a retreat, where she was away from her routine and responsibilities, led to Elizabeth's realization that she had been neglecting her own needs. What can you or your community do to get a fresh perspective on your volunteer experience? Brainstorm ways of "getting away" and shaking up your perspective.
- Just in case a surprise "snow day" did not happen for you, what are some ways in which you could give yourself permission to experience a "snow hour" or a couple of hours? In order for you to say "yes" to giving yourself some free time, what would you have to say "no" to?
- Elizabeth expressed a strong desire to experience God's presence? What desires or needs stir within you? How do you respond to these stirrings?

Refresh Yourself: An Assessment Tool

With your community or by yourself, use the following 5-to-1 scale to assess four major areas of your life: 5 - I'm doing really well; 4 - I'm OK, but need new challenges; 3 - My forward progress is on hold; 2 - I'm slipping a little; 1 - I've really neglected this area.



Spiritual Challenges

- I spend time with God in prayer.
- I search for God in nature, community, other.
- I attempt to integrate and balance mind, heart and body.
- I actively develop my faith (read scripture, act justly, etc.)



Intellectual Challenges

- I continue to be hungry to learn.
- I read to get new ideas.
- I'm eager to learn through discussion.

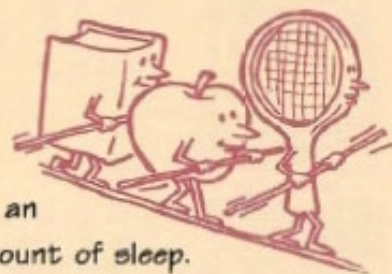


Emotional Challenges

- I'm willing to share my feelings.
- I'm learning to respect others' feelings.
- I'm learning to respect my own feelings.
- I'm taking some relationships to a new level.

Physical Challenges

- I exercise regularly.
- My diet is well balanced.
- I'm getting an adequate amount of sleep.
- I relax and frolic with others.



My Plan of Action for Renewal . . .

Which of the four areas above is your strongest? _____ Weakest? _____

Do I feel I am balanced in these four areas? Yes No.

Two steps I can take for rejuvenating my weakest area are: _____

Volunteers & missionaries, there are great resources for you at: www.pallotticenter.org



Click to the "Current Volunteers" section where we've created a number of services to help support volunteers like you! Having trouble thinking of a community activity? Then check out the "Activity of the Week." We'll also post a new recipe each week... sharing ideas and traditional recipes from other volunteers around the world. We've listed all kinds of great resources for the whole country too, including spirituality & retreat centers, peace & justice groups, cultural events, & much more. Check out the discussion forum too. *We hope you'll stop by & visit us on the web soon!*



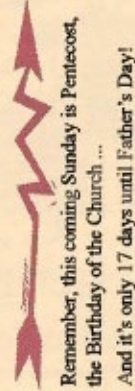
Finding Time For Yourself

Volunteers and missionaries are often so busy serving and giving to others that it's not uncommon for them to get into a rut as they forget to take time for themselves. Springtime offers all sorts of opportunities to nurture yourself, come alive again, get a second wind and become rejuvenated!

We suggest that you use the calendar below (or a calendar that you're already using) to list various activities to help nurture yourself and your volunteer community. Brainstorm ideas with your community members or use some of the ideas that we've listed in the column to the right. Be creative and have fun!

May

"True happiness arises in the first place from the enjoyment of one's self." ~ Joseph Addison

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------------------|--|---------|-----------|---|--|--|
| 6 | 7 Share ideas for making a creative Mother's Day card (or, if mom has passed on, a Mom's Day card for dad). | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 Cinco de Mayo Have a dinner with Mexican & French food. Research why at www.mexonline.com/cinco.htm |
| 13 Mother's Day | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 Armed Forces Day. Have a discussion about your feelings about the U.S. military. |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 Celebration of Christ's Ascension. What's the religious significance of this feast? | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 Memorial Day | 29 | 30 | 31 |  <p>Remember, this coming Sunday is Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church ... And it's only 17 days until Father's Day!</p> | |

NURTURING ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Begin a community collection jar
- to save money for eating out or for some other activity later in the month
- Make maracas or plan a Mexican meal to celebrate Cinco de Mayo
- Check local paper for upcoming concert, theatre, movie, summer festival/event
- Create Mother's Day cards
- Make a list of 10 things you've done this year that you're proud of and/or that make you happy to be alive
- Plant a garden
- Have a water balloon fight
- Create an outdoor obstacle course
- Go on a scavenger hunt around the community
- Pick flowers
- Group haircuts/hairstyles. Allow members of your community to style or, if you're brave enough, to even cut your hair.
- Shampoo makes for great sculpting fun!
- Play a favorite childhood game (kick the can, ghost in the graveyard, SPUD, tag, kickball)
- Build a bonfire and make S'mores
- Have a lumber party in your house or camp out in your backyard
- Community cooking activity, i.e. cook brunch together on Sunday
- Community book reading night.
- Pick a favorite book & each person take a turn reading aloud
- Have a hidden-talent show/amazing people tricks night
- Gather your favorite tunes for a community dance party
- Story night: choose a topic, then everyone share a personal/funny story based on that topic
- Take a long walk by yourself
- Write a letter to an old friend or relative
- Write a poem about how you're feeling today
- Take pictures of the local flora
- Draw something in your neighborhood
- Bake something for your neighbors
- Write in your journal



The Church's Birthday: Volunteers Catching a Second Wind

Pentecost Sunday, 3 June 2001, is an interesting example of how a religious community and perhaps volunteers can catch a second wind. The Church identifies Pentecost not only as fifty days after Easter Sunday, but as a fulfillment of Christ's resurrection. Accordingly, it is Pentecost, not Easter, which the Church names as its "birthday."

We give such great emphasis to Easter. So how could Pentecost be the birthday? After all, had not the disciples enthusiastically walked with and known Jesus for three years? So, wasn't the Church born earlier? Not so.

Although the disciples walked with Jesus, they were unaware of the bigger picture. They also lacked the cohesiveness typical of strong families or a Church. Good Friday had taken the wind from their sails. The disciples remained wracked with fear for the next seven

weeks. Now, gathered in the Upper Room in the early morning of the first Pentecost Sunday, they struggled as individuals filled with uncertainty, gloom and emptiness. Are there any ways it reminds you of the first "birthday" of the world?

Read in Genesis 1:1-5 about the first day of creation. Notice how God's divine wind, Ruah, transformed the world. Then read about the coming of the 'second wind' in Acts 2:1-12. Read between the biblical lines. How was the disciples' world recreated? What transformations or resurrections took place? Fast forward to today. What are some aspects of your volunteer community or your volunteer world that could benefit you or others in gaining a "second wind?" For what transformations or resurrections are you desiring?

'Happy Birthday,' everyone!

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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. Regional 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.



INSIDE: Stories and activities to nurture the spiritual development of lay volunteers and missionaries!

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