

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Twelve, Number One

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

Team Building by Celebrating Our Differences

by Mieke Walsh
Holy Cross Associates

"Kill them... by whatever means possible and as soon as possible," was the urgent plea. No, this is not a line from a sci-fi summer blockbuster. I'm talking about ants... a lot of them. They had raided our kitchen, a kitchen I shared with six other people all participating in a year of service and communal living in Portland, Oregon as a part of the Holy Cross Associates program. The ants had come in from the back door and had virtually taken over our kitchen cabinets full of our carelessly sealed containers and boxes of food. This sparked a big debate in our house. How do we deal with the ant problem? Trivial though it may seem (and I certainly never expected before I began the year that I would debate ants), the discussion which ensued and the subsequent conclusion revealed a lot about my community and the way in which we worked as a team. It fell in with other hot house topics like deciding whether or not to keep the microwave, buy a Christmas

tree, repair the broken car and how to properly clean the bathroom. You name it and it was a discussion to be had, a decision to be made. These were the common trappings of my intentional community and the everyday issues that my fellow volunteers and I faced. The challenge for us was dealing with them and remaining a successful community, that is to say a healthy and productive team.

I digress from the ants.

We had a problem on our hands and it needed to be solved.

That much was clear. We all had different ideas on how to approach the problem.

Our nature-boy thought that we could live with the ants. And if we did get rid of them, he didn't want to use any chemicals to do the job, but was sure that we could find an organic remedy. The pacifist in the house suggested that, "maybe if we seal off all the food and clean really well they will find their own

"I discovered in my year of community living that success as a team did not mean capitalizing on our similarities. It meant celebrating our differences."

'Team Building...' continued on page 3



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Warm and sincere greetings to all the new volunteers and missionaries! You've taken an exciting, challenging and huge step. We hope this issue of *Shared Visions* encourages you and your fellow volunteers to build and maintain a sense of teamwork throughout your volunteer experience. Best wishes!

Former volunteers, Mieke and Ryan, share stories from their volunteer experience and how their communities were able to develop a strong sense of teamwork pp. 1-3

Cutting Your Grocery Bills p. 2

Activity: Getting to Know You p. 4

Website for Current Volunteers! p. 4

Activity: Bones of Contention p. 5

Team-Building in the Bible p. 6



Our Greatest Strength

by Ryan Murphy, *Farm of the Child*

I spent two and a half years at Farm of the Child, an orphanage, elementary school, and health clinic in rural Honduras. Our volunteer community was made up of between twelve to eighteen volunteer missionaries and shared living wasn't always that easy. Part of the challenge was we were so different from each other. But even with that, living together under the same relatively small roof often produced intense experiences of teamwork.

Teamwork, however, often did not mean harmony. Getting us to agree and work together was challenging. Over time, we discovered our strengths were in our shared awareness of the poverty and suffering in Honduras, dedication to mission, and our ability to forgive one another. When we focused on these strengths, we worked well as a team.

My volunteer experience in Honduras started in early October 1998, just three weeks before Hurricane Mitch hit the country. The hurricane was very devastating and we were fortunate to escape the path of destruction and find shelter in a town called Olanchito. The hurricane parked itself over Honduras and for eight days the rain did not stop. We brought enough food with us, but our supply of clean water was limited. Pink eye broke out and most of the fifty children under our care and many adults were infected. During that first rainy week, we were challenged to contain the children inside small quarters, out of the downpour, and to keep their few clothes clean and dry. We had to stay in Olanchito for two more weeks because roads were impassible and we could not return to the orphanage. For my volunteer community, these weeks tested our ability to work together as a team. During that time, I witnessed much cooperation and sharing within the volunteer group and between volunteers and the local Honduran

'Our Greatest Strength' continued on page 2

community. Many of the new volunteers took on jobs that they were normally not accustomed to, such as teaching, leading prayer, or washing lots of dishes. Some Hondurans that lived nearby were kind enough to bring paper and crayons for the children. With few toys or other school supplies, the crayons kept the kids busy and saved our sanity. I think the awareness of the suffering caused by the hurricane helped us realize how fortunate we were and gave us the ability to be flexible and overlook some of the "minor" stresses we were experiencing.

Another factor which helped us develop effective teamwork was a communal sense of mission. The Farm of the Child had a strong mission statement and a history that inspires every volunteer. Farm of the Child was originally founded by Vincent and Zulena "Pescatore" in the northern jungles of Guatemala. After eight years in Guatemala, they decided to build a similar project in Honduras. It was at this time that Vincent died in a plane crash. Zulena, a young widow with five children, decided to continue on with her husband's dream and open Farm of the Child in Trujillo. When Zulena recounted some stories, her family's struggles, hearing about her missionary life would keep us on the edge of our seats. Her stories were better than anything Hollywood had to offer. When we as a community were reminded of these specific values, it helped us overcome the issues that divided us and gave common ground to our volunteer commitment.

A final aspect of teamwork that I experienced at Farm of the Child was forgiveness. As you may have noticed, my time with the other volunteers was marked as much by disunion and arguments as it was by cooperation and patience. Being human, it is impossible to live with people for two years and never offend, lose your patience, or irritate them. Most people who volunteer are motivated by strong beliefs on religion, politics,

"It is not easy to argue with someone one night and then make breakfast for him or her the next day."



and social justice, and this was certainly the case in my volunteer community. Most of us were not shy about expressing our views and how those views should best be put into action serving the children and the local Honduran community. In addition to our individual beliefs and attitudes, we also went to bed at different times, liked different kinds of food, and listened to different kinds of music. These small things aren't so small when you face them everyday. It is not easy to argue with someone one night and then make breakfast for him or her the next day.

There was definitely a steady diet of shoe in mouth and humble pie for many of us in the volunteer house. At one time or another, everyone in the group needed to unconditionally forgive and be forgiven by others. When this did not happen, when we held grudges, not only did the entire volunteer community suffer, but we also impaired our ability to serve the whole Farm of the Child community. When we were able to forgive, there was more of a sense of peace and freedom to do what we felt we were called to do.

All of our jobs were very interdependent, and it was easy to let the frustrations of the workday like power outages, car breakdowns, and money worries, spill into community life. Sometimes a little cooling off time and a late night conversation on the nearby beach helped heal wounds. Other times a fellow volunteer would become a sounding board and a gentle mediator. Attending prayer services together also worked wonders among us. Often, there would be a community event such as a holiday celebration or an energizing volunteer gathering that would remind us that what we had in common was greater than our problems. Fortunately, forgiveness was our greatest strength and was given often. This, more than anything else, was what truly made us an effective team. +

** Vincent Pescatore graduated (1978) from a Pallottine Fathers and Brothers high school, Bishop Eustace Prep, located outside Philadelphia in Cherry Hill, NJ.*

"... when we held grudges, not only did the entire volunteer community suffer, but we also impaired our ability to serve the whole Farm of the Child community."



Cutting Your Grocery Bills

- > Plan ahead by listing the items you need and stick to the list.
- > Only shop once a week. The more you go, the more you'll be tempted to pick up something you don't need.
- > Check unit prices & bring along a calculator if you need to.
- > Stock up on items that will keep and that you can use if you can get a bulk discount.
- > Store brands or generic items are always cheaper.
- > Cut your own meats. It's generally cheaper to buy a whole chicken than one that has been cut up for you.
- > Shop at off peak hours and after you've eaten!
- > Shop in the evening. Often the deli or bakery, where items are sold fresh on a daily basis, mark things down. They usually toss everything that is left unsold for the day. Buy in bulk and freeze your food items. Wrapping them carefully in saran wrap will prevent freezer burn.
- > Use the cheapest brown rice you can find instead of the fast cooking expensive brown rice. Cook a huge batch of it at once since it is so time consuming and freeze it in freezer bags. When it is needed for meals, just thaw out a bag-full. The taste is the same & it saves money and time.
- > Watch the cash register like a hawk. 1 out of every 30 items is incorrectly scanned. Cashiers can make mistakes so keep your eyes open and always check your receipt before you leave the store. The computerized scanners may have been input with the wrong or non-sale price.
- > Don't forget to use coupons.



Questions for Ryan's article:

- ⇒ Do some brain-storming, either as individuals or as a group and come up with five reasons why emergencies bring people together. What are some ways your volunteer community can implement these team-building factors now, in so-called "normal times," in the absence of emergencies?
- ⇒ Think back on and perhaps list the various "teams" (broadly understood) to which you have belonged in the past five or ten years. Which were among the strongest and what contributed to that strength? Share your stories with your fellow volunteers.
- ⇒ The suffering and chaos caused by Hurricane Mitch helped Ryan's community to be more flexible. How would you rate yourself in terms of flexibility? Your community? Any improvements needed?
- ⇒ The strengths of Ryan's community was "in our shared awareness, dedication and forgiveness." Brainstorm a list of your community's strengths. Which are the three strongest?
- ⇒ Forgiveness is something we all need to give and receive. As Ryan mentioned, "When we were able to forgive, there was more of a sense of peace and freedom to do what we felt we were called to do." How do you show or display forgiveness to one another? Is it with spoken words, a smile, a hug, a note?
- ⇒ What, if any, are issues that seem to divide your community? How can your community overcome these obstacles?



way out." To others, there was no moral issue at stake, "get the ants out; if that means chemicals and death, fine." Some of us didn't want to deal with it and said, "Let me know when you make a decision." How on earth were we going to make a decision? Obviously, not everyone was going to get what he or she wanted...but we had to find a way to work through it. We sat down. We talked about the options. We laughed at each other's suggestions and laughed at our own (because really: live with the

"Rather than set up camps in separate corners of the house, we have celebrated these differences, even laughed in their face."

ants? The ants will leave of their own accord? That's funny!) We agreed on a plan and a back up plan when (I mean if) the first failed and we carried out that plan. For the record: the pacifist conceded, organic measures didn't work and we ended up spraying Raid everywhere and there were no hard feelings.

I think that the interesting point here is not that we dealt with the ants, but rather our method for coming to a conclusion. We had to work as a team, but we didn't even necessarily have the same goal in mind. Aren't teams

defined as a group working towards a common goal? We most often regard teams in terms of this likeness. But what I discovered in my year of community living was that success as a team did not mean capitalizing on our similarities. It meant celebrating our differences. Despite the obvious commonalities of seven college educated 20 somethings choosing to do a year of service in the same program, our differences were quite marked. It was important for us to recognize and accept that we were there for different reasons, from different places in our lives and were looking for different things from this experience. We most often hail teams in which a group works well together "despite their differences" and "sets aside" those differences in order to work together for the common goal that they share. I like to think of my community (my team) differently. I like to think that we worked so well together precisely because of our differences. Though we were united in many ways through what we were doing in Portland that year as volunteers, we were still each on our own personal journeys that were as unique as each of us. In that way, our goals were very much different and weren't necessarily clear to even ourselves. In this we learned from each other and pushed each other in many ways. We asked each other to look outside of our own personal goals and consider the goals of the other people with whom we were sharing the year. Facing our differences enabled us to think beyond the norms that we had when we arrived in Portland.

So how did we get to the point where we could agree to disagree, embrace our differences and without hostility still decide what to do about the ants? First, we had committed ourselves to the community from the outset. It was understood that we were going to work at it from the first days that we met. That commitment went quite a long way as the year progressed. Second, we developed tools that enabled us to thrive on the differences that existed in our community. One of the most important tools that we certainly used everyday in my house was humor. Everyone knows that laughter can take the edge off of a tense situation. It was important for us not to take

ourselves too seriously. A corollary to that was that each of us had to be able to trust the rest of our community to acknowledge / respect our needs at the same time. It meant a willingness to be vulnerable, to laugh at ourselves. Our humor was not a means of avoidance of complex issues. Rather, I feel it was a creative and effective way to work through difficult situations. It was a tool that worked well for my community because it kept us liking each other.

Thirdly, we also talked about our expectations early on so that we could recognize some of our limitations and understand the ways in which we were different. By doing this we established a norm of good communication from the first week we met. This allowed us, as the year went on, to be direct and honest without hurting one another's feelings. We were able to nudge each other in encouraging ways that were not forceful. Because we trusted each other, we were able to let go of frustrations with each other when things were difficult. We still enjoyed each other and held no grudges, hard feelings or resentments.

For my community, being a team meant learning from each other and loving the ways in which we were different. I had a wonderful community experience and it was very difficult for me to say goodbye to my housemates. As we were preparing to leave at the end of our year of service, I reflected on the year, on the success of our community and on what it meant to be leaving. Here is an excerpt of a letter that I wrote to my community.

"Our community is not perfect, just as each of us fall (slightly) below perfection. Yet somehow, this is precisely why it is so beautiful. We are seven different individuals with seven different sets of gifts, neuroticisms, temperaments, talents, peculiarities, and interests. But rather than set up camps in separate corners of the house, we have "celebrated" these differences, even laughed in their face and have made the most of what has been given to us this year. I would even venture to say that these differences are what allowed us to discover the love, support, wisdom, humility, acceptance, patience, forgiveness that we bring to this community."

Now, two years later, these words still ring true for me. ✦



Questions for Mieke's article:

- To what extent have you felt that you are part of a team? Give an example. Note: having a team-feeling is different from "believing" or "thinking" you're on a team.
- What could your community of volunteers or co-workers do differently which would increase for you your sense of teamwork? What could you do?
- How do you and your housemates generally arrive at decisions for important community questions? What improvements, if any, could be made to your decision making process?
- As a community, discuss with one another the different reasons each of you chose to volunteer. Describe some of the things each of you hopes to gain from this experience and/or some of the goals you have.
- Volunteers often enter into their term of service with high expectations. Spend some time reflecting on what you hope to accomplish during this volunteer year. What are your personal expectations in regard to your work, your friendships, your spirituality, your personal growth? Journal or share aloud as a community.



Getting to Know You

Really knowing your fellow volunteers is a smart step toward building teamwork in your community or in your work environment. Consider gathering with your housemates or co-workers and discussing the questions below. You just might discover something surprising about someone you thought you already knew pretty well, and, who knows, you might start to feel more like a team.

Supplies needed: Paper, pens/pencils, open minds. **Time needed:** About one hour.

Instructions: Gather together. Write the following three questions on a piece of paper and display them somewhere so everyone can read them:



NEEDS - Expressing your personal, emotional, physical and/or spiritual needs to one another can help volunteers put the needs of others before their own, it can nurture respect within a community and it can help you understand where each person is coming from - all key elements of teamwork.

Question: *What are a few of your personal, emotional, spiritual and/or physical needs?*



GROWTH AREAS - Being honest and openly admitting areas where you fall short can build trust and respect among community members and, ultimately, build teamwork. **Question:** *What are some areas where you feel you need to grow?*



SKILLS / STRENGTHS - Recognizing and putting to use your fellow volunteers' skills and strengths is one excellent way to build teamwork in your community. Who knows what hidden skills your housemates or co-workers possess? **Question:** *What do you consider are a few of your best skills/strengths?*

Each person take a few minutes for each question, answering the 'Needs', 'Growth Areas' and 'Skills/Strengths' questions on separate slips of paper. Collect all the answers when everyone has completed all three questions. Make three piles, one for each of the three types of questions. Then, each person take a turn picking one answer from the 'Needs' pile and read the answer aloud. Everyone try to guess who wrote that answer. Keep track of how well your community is able to recognize who wrote each response. Repeat the process for the 'Growth Areas' question and, then, for the 'Skills/Strengths' question.



Take a Closer Look:

- ① *How well was your community able to recognize the needs, growth areas and skills of one another? Any need for better communication within your group? If so, talk to each other about how your community can maintain more open forms of communication.*
- ② *Discuss reactions to the "needs" that your community shared. How can you help one another meet these needs?*
- ③ *Discuss reactions to the "growth areas" that your community shared. How can your community respectfully challenge one another to work at your individual growth areas?*
- ④ *Discuss reactions to the "skills/strengths" that your community shared. What are some additional strengths within the community members which have not been mentioned? Which team-building skills, if any, are in short supply?*

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!*





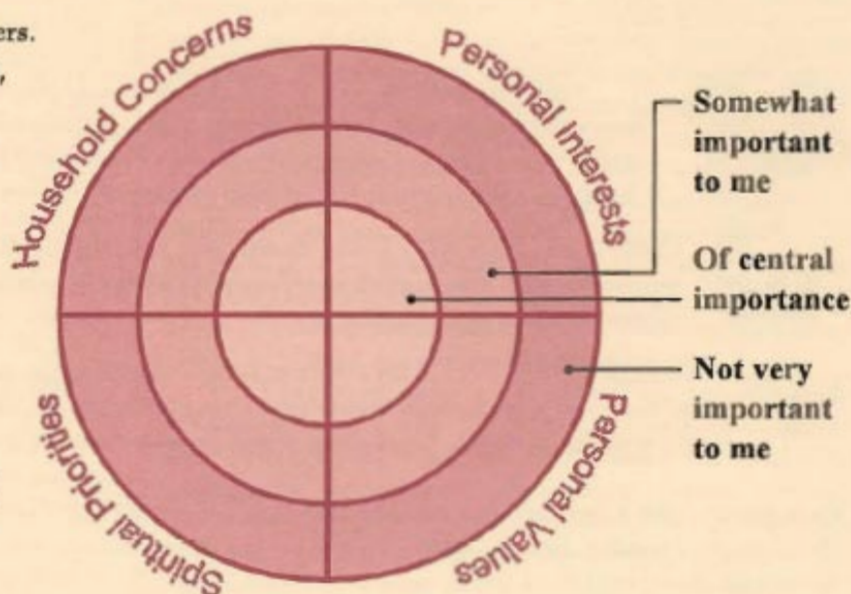
BONES OF CONTENTION

Some volunteers say teamwork is more likely to happen when community members share with each other their personal priorities. Here are a few lists of typical "bones of contention" and other values which sometimes divide communities. Examine the list and identify which bones you really care about and which you see as "small stuff." Share your priorities and see if you can have a meeting of the minds in your community.

Supplies Needed: Posterboard or large newsprint, colored pens or markers. **Time needed:** About one hour.

Instructions: Gather with your fellow volunteers.

On a posterboard or a large sheet of newsprint, draw a large circle with two smaller circles inside of it. Then divide the circles into four quadrants, labeling the wedges with the four category names (see the image to the right). Choose one category to start with. All participants should take a turn writing each "bone of contention" from the lists below in the pie (consider adding your own "bones" to each list). Place each bone in the appropriate category and level of importance. Everyone repeat the process for the remaining three categories. Each person use a different colored pen or marker.



TYPICAL BONES OF CONTENTION:

Personal Values

- Vegetarian meals
- Using public transportation
- Personal promptness
- Sharing/discussing ideas
- Volunteers' public image
- Physical fitness
- Personal hygiene
- Program's reputation
- Making money
- Social justice
- Family

Personal Interests

- Having fun together
- Music Movies Exercise
- Your service placement
- Dancing Parties Politics
- Chocolate Food
- Community Involvement
- Learning new stuff
- Sports (playing/watching)
- Dating Journaling
- Smoking Drinking

Spiritual Priorities

- Discussing spirituality Scripture Church
- Sharing prayer Learning about new religions

Household Concerns

- Keeping kitchen sink clear of dirty dishes
- House quiet at bedtime/sleeping habits
- Making sure common areas are tidy
- Having rugs vacuumed weekly
- Having furniture dusted as needed
- Community budget well maintained
- Noise level of music Safety/Security
- Keeping a clean bathroom



Really Sinking Your Teeth In:

- As a group, examine the circle that you have just filled with all your different "bones of contention." Discuss your reactions. Are there any surprises?
- Discuss any recognizable patterns. Are there any areas of common values? Any major conflicts in priorities?
- How can your community foster teamwork, despite your differences in priorities?
- Hang your completed chart in a visible place where your community can view it often. Use it as a tool to celebrate all that you have in common, to appreciate your diversity, and to continue building teamwork!



Biblical Reflection: Team Building in the Bible

Here's an unusual approach to team building in the Bible. See if you can figure out how it can apply to a community of volunteers.

Read the important Old Testament story of Jacob who had a really bad sleep wrestling the entire night with an 'angel' (Genesis 32: 23-29), God in disguise. So pleased was God that Jacob wrestled well against him that God gave him a blessing and a special new name, "Israel," meaning "his wrestling shows God's strength." Eventually, Jacob had 12 sons whose many descendants, the 12 tribes of Israel, are the 12 foundation stones for the Jewish nation, also named Israel.

Jesus, in building his team, the Church, the new nation of Israel, specifically picked 12 apostles and noted they were replacing the

12 tribes (Matthew 19:28). This is also the way the early Christians saw it. "The walls of it (the new Jerusalem) were of a great height, and had twelve gates; at each of the twelve gates there was an angel, and over the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.... The city walls stood on twelve foundation stones, each one of which bore the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Jesus)" (Revelations 21: 10-14).

Teams happen through struggle/wrestling. Sports teams struggle with opponents' strengths. Religious teams struggle with God and people's needs. What are you struggling with? What do volunteer communities struggle/wrestle with and how does this build teamwork? In what sense is wrestling with God the foundation of the Church, as it was for the nation of Israel?

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. 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 personal, communal and spiritual development of lay volunteers and missionaries!

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