

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Twelve, Number Three

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

Touched By God, Even in Pain

by Liz Mach

Maryknoll Lay Volunteer

It happened within a split second. We were driving the dirt road between Southern Sudan and the northwest corner of Kenya when we came over a rise in the road. There was a truck carrying relief goods of food and living supplies off the road in the trees, with broken glass shining in the dirt. The beginning of a seemingly unending volley of gunshots carried us down the road as twelve men opened fire at the truck in which we were riding. During that split second, the windshield exploded and bullets were flying through the truck, bouncing off the dashboard settling into the back of the passenger seat where I was sitting.

I think we always knew theoretically that an ambush was a possibility. Would it ever happen to one of us? People tend to think they are invulnerable to such an action. That hot, dusty day in S. Sudan I realized that I was very fragile and vulnerable.

Of the four people in our truck, I was the only one injured. I left the ambush wounded, in both my knee and chest, by shrapnel from bits of the truck fragmented by the bullets. I also walked away in disbelief that we were all alive.

Of the two other trucks hit that afternoon, at least 4 people were killed. We all ended up that evening in the triage of the International Committee of the Red Cross Hospital which was there to receive war wounded from the ongoing conflict in S. Sudan. We made strange bedfellows. The thirty beds in triage were filled with soldiers wounded in the war, and in the bed next to me was a young boy hurt in the same ambush.

A split second on a dusty road connected me with the mass of suffering people in Southern Sudan in a way that I will never forget. I was just as vulnerable as they were: race, gender, or age made no difference to a bullet. Being there as a missionary who was trying to be of service made no difference to those shooting the guns. The heart thumping terror was reality.

What I did begin to understand was the meaning of the phrase in Swahili: Mungu Yupo (God is with us). God was certainly on the journey with us that day. Some saw the face of God as they

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this our Easter issue we invite your reflection on two Easter themes, violence and **passover**. Maryknoll missionary Liz Mach's article on violence, previously published in *Shared Visions*, helps us address our concerns of living with violence in the context of the crucifixion of Christ; Bill Brennan shares his experience of "passing over" into the lives of those he served.

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An Open Ear, An Open Heart

by Bill Brennan

Holy Cross Associates

Two months after I graduated from college, I packed most of my belongings into a car and headed across the country to Portland, Oregon to begin my year as a Holy Cross Associate (HCA) volunteer. With me on the trip was one of my future housemates (we'd known each other for 96 hours before leaving), a three day supply of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and a mind full of questions.

I used the forty-hour drive out west to share my concerns with my housemate. Since I was the first HCA to be placed at JOIN: A Center for Involvement, I did not know what to expect. I vaguely remembered reading that JOIN's mission was related to homelessness and teenagers. What did I know about homelessness, let alone teenagers? Would I be working with homeless teenagers? If not, what would I need to do to connect and build relationships with the homeless folks at JOIN? (I had visions of everyone learning I had gone to high school in the Bronx and college in Indiana, thereby expecting me to be able to play basketball. Scientists still use me as an example that all people from these two places do not have hoops in their genes.)

My housemate and I decided on two things when we arrived in Portland. First, I

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needed to be patient in order to build relationships with the folks with whom I would work. Second, I should spend less time talking and more time listening. This probably stemmed from the fact that I talked most of the drive out to Portland.

I showed up at JOIN for my first day of work both excited and nervous. JOIN's Executive Director, Rob Justus (no pun intended), wanted to acquaint me with my new surroundings right away. Therefore, we took a walk around the campus of St. Francis Church. Most of the folks who made up the community around St. Francis were homeless campers. They came to St. Francis mainly because there was a dining hall that served dinner each day for the community of St. Francis. However, many of them also felt St. Francis was a place where they were accepted for who they were and not judged by their appearance.

Watching Rob interact with everyone around the campus was the first of many lessons in relationship building that I learned that year. Almost everyone knew Rob and had a story or two to share with him. I noticed that Rob did not say much during these exchanges. Rather, he listened to their stories with his full attention. After a while I asked Rob about his unusual approach. His answer was similar to most of the responses he gave that year. Instead of

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sharing with me his reasons, he encouraged me to find out for myself by building relationships of my own.

Bad Bob was the first homeless camper I met. He had a Grizzly Adams way about him: confident and reserved at the same time. He had lived on the streets for over 15 years and introduced me to dumpster diving and scrap metal collecting. I listened to his stories about his travels on the freight trains and sleeping under bridges. After a few days, Bob introduced me to the others who shared the campsite with him. Gloria, Bud, George, Quiet Joe and Tumble-weed all had fascinating stories of their own. They asked Rob what I was doing at JOIN and he told them I was "volunteering my time." Of course, their next question was what law did I break that required this type of community service. What surprised me was how open folks were and how many stories they shared with me. I remember sitting at the dining hall one afternoon listening to George, who seldom shared his thoughts with anyone, talk about his past as a teacher. In the middle of his story, he stopped and said,

"You're different."

"Should I take that as a compliment?" I asked.

"You're different because you're smarter than most. You don't spend all your time running your mouth. You listen, which means you're learning." What George did not share with me that day was that he had tuberculosis. He died shortly after that conversation.

Looking back on my first day at JOIN, Rob could have told me that listening was important in building relationships. However, I think he wanted me to hear that advice from those I was working with at St. Francis. Time and again, folks told me that the most dehumanizing

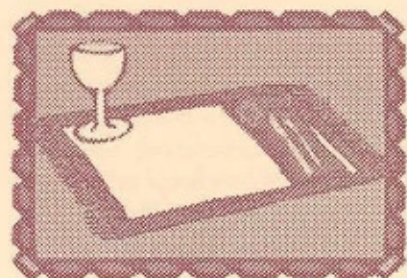
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Passing Over into Others' Lives

The climax of Jesus' entire life took place during his last three days, from his Last Supper on Thursday to his Resurrection on Sunday. Today, the Church celebrates this sacred time as the Triduum which culminates with the Easter Vigil liturgy. The richness of the Triduum is that Christ overcomes violence and shows us how to "pass over" into the lives of those around us.

Historical Background

The religious context of that first Easter took place during the Jewish feast of Passover. It is the 3,000 year old Jewish celebration that coincides with our 2,000 year old Christian Easter celebration. Passover is the name given to the Jewish Seder supper which celebrates the Exodus and the Jews' final evening meal before their escape from slavery in Egypt. (Exodus, chapter 12 ff.)



The Passover Mystery

Christ's final three days urge each of us to live out the Easter mystery of death and resurrection in our daily lives. We are all called to follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice, as we die to self and seek God's will in our lives. To make the Passover shift, from being self-centered to being other-centered we must first accept the grace of God passing over into our own lives. God's grace helps us to cease being the protagonist in every one of our stories and to start passing over into the lives of others and really being present to them.

The Volunteer Advantage

The experience of being a volunteer provides some natural bridges to cross over in to others' lives. This idea of a volunteer's passover parallels the Triduum in three ways: through service to and with others, identifying with their suffering, and sharing life-giving hope and joy....

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thing about being homeless was the fact that people ignored them. The simple gesture of taking the time to listen to their stories helped me create lasting relationships with most of the homeless persons I met that year. I still see some of the folks on my bike ride to work each day. They are still full of stories, and I still try to take the time to listen. +

Questions for Bill's article:

☞ In order to better understand the homeless folks, Bill visited where they lived on the streets and under the bridges, and listened to their stories. What are the differences in the culture and environment that you have had to "pass over" into as a volunteer? In what ways are you still considered and "outsider" in your neighborhood?

☞ The St. Francis campers felt dehumanized when people ignored them. How can you make an effort to acknowledge the humanity of those around you and those you pass on the streets? How can you improve your listening skills in order to be truly present to others? Make a list of three people to whom you would like to reach out. Next to each name write ways to get started.

☞ Since 9/11 most people have experienced a heightened sense of violence. Like Bill passing over into the pain of "Bad Bob", we have passed over into the pain of the terrorists' victims as well as that of the Afghani people. Since 9/11 to what extent have you passed over into different faiths, cultures and classes; and gleaned a better understanding of the plight of other people?

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lost their lives. Others of us saw the face of God in those who accompanied us as we began to deal with the feelings of loss, anger and disbelief that this actually happened. People really did shoot us. For me, God came with the people who focused their love and strength to help me in my healing process.

Three nurses at the hospital stabilized my wounds and let me talk about the horror. Margaret, the Sudanese wife of the driver of our truck, a nurse herself, sat with me the next day while I waited to be air evacuated. We cried and we prayed together throughout that day. The Maryknoll Sisters I had been living with in Nairobi enfolded me in their love the night I returned and made the necessary doctors' appointments to evaluate the wounds. Mark, an Associate in Maryknoll, sat with me for two afternoons sensing that I needed the gentle presence of someone to just be with me. Friends they are and always will be because they understood the simple message of the Gospel to be present to those in need.

I went through the many phases that one goes through when confronted with violence. Initially, I denied it all happened and just wanted to go to a house and "wash up." I wanted to be released from the hospital quickly to be able to go and continue my work in S. Sudan. I felt a numbness when I saw the Sudanese huddled around the truck carrying the dead. I trembled when Margaret came to visit me in the hospital and just wanted to hold me. I cried when it felt safe to do so. I had to put boundaries on my life for awhile for things like: where I drive, what time of day I drive, what areas of the city I enter into, with whom I go out at night and what situations I allow

myself to get into alone.

Where is God in all of this? Never before had I faced death so head on and so violently. I thought that God was love, so how did this happen? I was just trying to be of service to people and they hurt me.

God is love. I have never felt this so strongly as I do now. I saw the love of God in all those who reached out to me. I saw the love of God in the young boy from the second truck who lay on the bed next to me in the hospital. I felt the gentle presence of God in the messages I received from around the world. They were filled with concern and love and helped in my healing process.

But there are still remnants of post-traumatic stress in my life that I am dealing with now, one and a half years later. I have flashbacks; I have times of high anxiety that I need to work through. Am I angry at those men? I think I wonder more than anything why they would do something like this. What crazy things have happened in their lives that they don't value a human life? I do think I am angry when I think of the "war games" the world plays without concern for civilians living in the area. And, I pray for those who feel the need to act out the violence and for their victims. Talking it over with God, friends and a therapist have helped me to focus the anger.

The ambush is a reality in my life. It happened. I don't know why, but I do know that I feel closer to God than I ever have in my life. I trust more in God's care for me. Are there more things that God wants from me yet? I like to think so. I have never before in my life been so open and trusting of others. I like to think that once we become so vulnerable - actually cut open and exposed - we have gone over that edge that we pull back from in so many situations. I have been exposed. What happened was real. And God walked with me in a concrete way through Margaret, Mark, Carroll, Nuncia, Ruth and numerous others. I see the face of God each day now as I am touched and loved by so many. I am grateful. +

"Initially, I denied it all happened and just wanted to go to a house and 'wash up.'"

Questions for Liz's article

☞ Liz mentioned that after the ambush she realized she was "very fragile and vulnerable." Name one experience or event you have had so far because of which you have felt vulnerable or fragile. Who are the friends, guides, professionals with whom you would feel comfortable sharing and processing your pain?

☞ The ambush made Liz feel connected with the mass of suffering people in Southern Sudan. How have you felt connected to the suffering of the people you serve?

☞ In being a witness to the suffering of many people it can be difficult to see the presence of God and His love. Describe a situation or event that incited a feeling of doubt or fear that God may have been absent. Conversely, describe a situation or event in which you have seen God's love.



Developing a Community Safety Plan



It is important to think about safety issues before a violent act occurs. Both personal reflection regarding how you react to violent situations and confidence in a tangible safety plan can help you react better if a confrontational situation does occur.

Take time to ask yourself the following questions, and then discuss them as a community as well. Everyone has a different threshold for violence. It is important to be self aware, self accepting and attuned to your community's level of awareness.

Phase 1: Personal Reflection and Community Sharing

Reflect on your experience with violence.....

What kind of violence have you seen or experienced in your own life as a volunteer?

How has your exposure to violence affected you? What emotions has it touched?

How have you dealt with these feelings? What helped -- what didn't?

Phase 2: Property Violations

If you should experience theft or damage to personal belongings....

Who are the support people you would need to call (eg. Police, neighbors, insurance, program administrator, etc.)?

What are the phone numbers you and your community would need to have on hand?

How do you and your housemates feel about the precautions you now take in your house and neighborhood?

What changes do you want to make in light of your answers?

Phase 3: Personal Violations

If you were to become a victim of violence yourself (robbery, mugging, sexual assault)....

Where is a place you can go to regain a sense of safety?

Who are support people you would need to call immediately (friends in surrounding community, volunteer program administrators, crisis center/hotline, police, support services in local area, counselor, neighbors, family)?

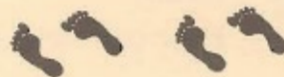
What are ways you can document exactly what happened (write every detail of the event, summarize police and medical info)?

What is your personal style for managing crisis (straightforwardness, over-reaction, denial, etc.)?

What practical steps can your community take to create a safer environment and a support network in case a violent act does occur?

Take your whole community for a walk around the neighborhood!

What's down that street? Have you looked behind that dumpster? Where could you run for help? What paths do you all take to work? Are they well lit? Meet your neighbors. Find out who's around. Who would hear you if you yelled? What do you think about pepper spray? Think about it in terms of knowing your options ahead of time. It's not paranoid to do this; it will give you time to react quickly if you need to. Thinking ahead of time about what you would do makes everyone safer?



What follows are reflections and activities centered on the Passover experience of the Easter Triduum.

Holy Thursday

The Church begins the Triduum with Holy Thursday's service of the washing of the feet and the command that we do so to others. In Jesus' time people walked through sand and dust all day long and feet were cracked, dry and dirty. Washing the feet was a job of the servants. And yet we are called to do this for each other: to embrace people in their most vulnerable state.

On Holy Thursday we also celebrate the Eucharist: communion with God and one another. We are sharing in the bread that is Christ, broken for our sake. We are nourished by Christ and become bread ourselves, "broken" in sacrifice to one another.

As volunteers we are constantly reminded of vulnerability and brokenness. We see it in our own limitations and in the struggles of those we serve.

This Easter season reflect on the meaning behind Holy Thursday. Discover the symbols in the Passover story and what they mean for you. Reflect on the service you are giving and how you treat those around you each day. Do you stop to "wash" their feet? How are you "bread" for others? How do you live Jesus' example that service is crucial to our existence?

Activities

A sit-down dinner is still one of the most intimate ways to share with other people. A communal meal conveys hospitality,

respect and acceptance. Share a meal with your housemates or others with whom you don't normally break bread.

Do something special for people who deserve thanks and recognition, but may not always get it! (Bake cookies for a colleague, talk to a person at the newspaper stand, etc.)

Commit yourself to learn more about an issue important to you: world hunger, homelessness, wars, or any topic.

Good Friday

Jesus by his crucifixion on Good Friday, became one with the suffering of humanity. It seems that every day we learn about more suffering and injustices in the world. The stories of limitations and oppressions affecting people we know and people around the world can be overwhelming. Yet through his Passion, Jesus teaches us to recognize how others are suffering, to affirm their dignity and to help unburden their crosses.

To witness suffering is part and parcel of full-time volunteer work. Recognizing our own suffering is also a part of Good Friday's theme: to look within and reflect on global suffering, suffering in our own reality and Christ's ultimate suffering for us. Where have you witnessed Christ's passion and death in your workplace or neighborhood?

How can the example of

Christ's ultimate action be a source of strength in suffering?

Activities

Try to keep Good Friday free from distractions. Focus on slowing down, praying and fasting.

Gather and pray around a candle for those you know who have suffered or are suffering. Share stories about them. Give thanks for their courage and pray for gifts of continued strength and patience with their struggles.

Write Easter cards or "thinking of you" support mail to people you know are suffering with physical or emotional hardships. Remember those whose families are struggling. Be truly present to those you see are in pain.

Easter Sunday

From the despair of Good Friday to the hope of Easter Sunday, Jesus shows us through his resurrection, that hope triumphs over death!

Easter brings the joy of new life and new perspectives. We can see beyond the suffering, to be thankful for life's experiences and to become agents of change and renewal.

Volunteers are challenged to live the Easter celebration each day: to reject violence and to embrace love, acceptance and hope. By bringing hope to those who fear, volunteers help empower others with the Easter mes-

sage, so they can share in a resurrection that leads to new life.

What does Easter mean to you? How have you been changed by this great mystery? What signs do you see of hope and renewal?

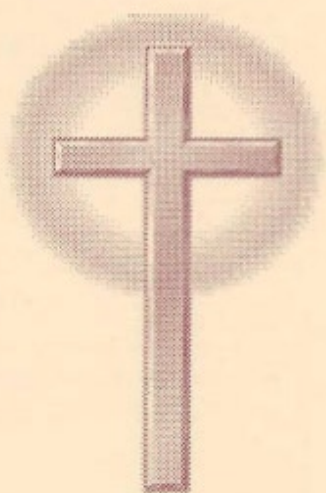
How can you bring about Christ's resurrection in your daily life? How can you be a reminder to others of our new life in Christ?

Activities

Share with each other your favorite Easter traditions from childhood. Try to incorporate each person's favorites into your day.

Cook a potluck dinner and welcome those who you know are celebrating alone. Keep hope alive!

Plan a midnight feast outdoors. In the peace of darkness, appreciate the simple beauty of nature at night. Reflect on the interconnectedness of our world. Pray together for the blessings of God's grace and peace throughout the world.



Biblical Reflection: Will the Real Jesus Please Rise? Which One?

The violence of 9/11, including the actions which came before and after that fateful day, confronts each of us with a choice: How do I respond to violence? When you think about Jesus and how his life gives Christians a model of how to respond to violence, is there but one image that comes to mind? Is it the forgiving Jesus who always turns the other cheek? For example, chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel (verse 39) gives us that very image: "if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well." Similarly, Jesus' beatitudes teach: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

But what if there is more to how Jesus' dealt with evil? What if he teaches us not to be passive, but to actively confront evil? For example, John's Gospel (18:20-24) describes Jesus' response when he was mocked and beaten by soldiers on Holy Thursday and Good Friday: "If there is something wrong in what I said, point it out; but if there is no offense in it, why do you strike me?" He engaged his tormentors and challenged

them to question their own actions. Is this the same active Jesus who drove the money changers from the temple (Matthew 21: 12-16)?

As you think about how you personally respond to violence and what our government policy needs to be, which image of Jesus is "rising" through your thoughts and influencing your decisions?

What are some local forms of violence (bullying, humiliation, unfairness) you see in your everyday volunteer experience which call for intervention?

What would effective intervention look like?

When you look to the bigger picture and contrast schools, neighborhoods or even governments, what are some policies you feel need to be changed in order to even the playing field?

Shared Visions

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©2002 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center Volume 12, Number 3

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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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