

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Thirteen, Number Three

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

Here's a Tool to Help You Make Sense of Life's Crazy: **The Pastoral Circle** Be Attentive! Be Smart! Be Decisive! Be Persistent!

During your volunteer year, maybe you have had some wonderful "success stories" of helping your homeless clients find affordable housing or seeing a child in foster care reunited with her family. Clearly, **your interactions with those you serve are necessary, life-giving and valuable.**

Maybe you have also had the experience of noticing that for every homeless person you assist, there are three more who are unable to find affordable housing, or for that one child reunited with her family, scores more are shuttled from foster home to foster home without much hope of knowing the stability of a loving family. Maybe you have found your-

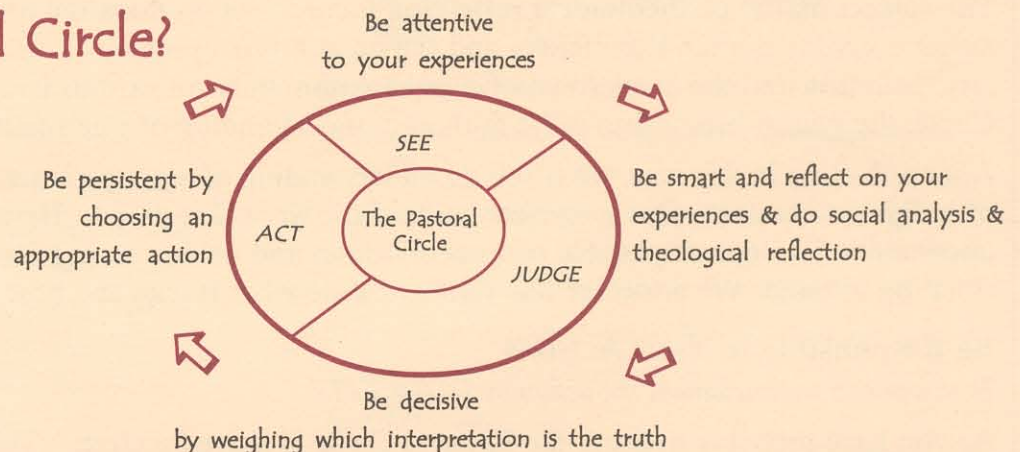
self at times frustrated with only being able to take the "band aid" approach to great human need. The experiences you have had with individual people in your service site, people whose names you know and faces you recognize, people you may now call friends, may have prompted you to ask new questions about the world in which we live:

"Why are more and more people becoming homeless?" "Who are the homeless?" "Why are less and less resources being put into affordable housing?" "Why do many homeless people seem to also be in need of mental health services?" "Why is it that people who work in full-time minimum wage jobs still cannot afford housing?"

In this issue of *Shared Visions*, we offer you a framework for reflecting upon your lived experience and for discerning your actions in the midst of your current (and future) realities. This framework is called the Pastoral Circle. Some of you may already be familiar with it through your volunteer program. For others, the format may be new, but you will undoubtedly recognize most of the ideas and concepts it contains. In either case, reflection upon our experiences is critical to knowing how to respond to the complexities of the world in which we live, not to mention responding to the seemingly insignificant experiences of our everyday lives. ✚

What is the Pastoral Circle?

Briefly put, it is a tool that can be used to critically reflect upon our lived experience, to analyze and understand the deeper structures that shape our experiences, and to respond to them as fully as possible. The Pastoral Circle offers an approach to a life that is characterized by awareness, study, prayerful discernment and careful action. Continue reading on page 2...

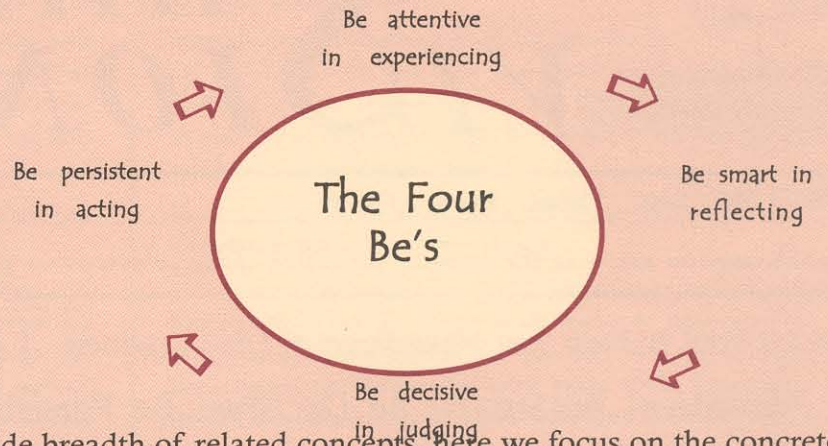


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EXPLORING THE PASTORAL CIRCLE

Sometimes life is not fair, especially to the oppressed, to those who are physically, psychologically, economically and spiritually disadvantaged. Even when life does seem fair, it does not always make sense. The Pastoral Circle, here explained, is a method for helping you understand and process your volunteer experiences.



Be Attentive to Your Experiences

Though the term "experience" covers a wide breadth of related concepts, here we focus on the concrete, lived reality of our daily lives. Our human experiences (typically comprised of interactions with other human beings, observations, feelings and/or thoughts), are valuable sources for future insight, clarity and knowledge. In this phase of the Pastoral Circle, we simply honor our experiences by naming them and describing them as fully as possible. We articulate our stories and listen to the stories of others who share the experience with us. In this phase, we "collect the data" of an experience without making judgments upon it.

Be Smart in Your Reflecting AND Be Decisive in Your Judging Truth

Reflection on our experience is comprised of social analysis and theological reflection. In this phase, we seek to understand our experiences by looking for the patterns that emerge and the relationships between them. It then leads us to be reasonable and decisive in our judgements.

Social Analysis is the work of deeply exploring an experience by seeking that which is at the root of it. To engage in social analysis, one must step back to name and examine the social, economic, political, cultural and religious currents in an experience. Social analysis is an endeavor of critical reflection in which we make our assumptions explicit and explore the structures that contribute (positively or negatively) to an experience. Here one could experience a lot of uncertainty as to what is the truth and what is the best action to take.

The subject matter of **theological reflection** focuses not on doctrinal themes of traditional theology, but rather everyday human experiences and the great human problems of the day, like war, oppression, poverty, pollution and the breakdown of human community on various levels. In this phase of the Pastoral Circle, the person brings into it the faith and understanding of one's faith community and tradition.

After reflecting in this way, we reach an understanding of an experience. We then must make some sort of judgment about it. Our judgment guides how we will respond. Here one could experience a lot of uncertainty. We look at possible courses of action and deliberate as to which one will best respond to the situation at hand. We prioritize our values, decide what is true and how to take action.

Be Responsible in Your Actions

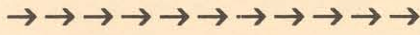
In this phase, we implement the action by DOING IT!!

As you have probably noticed, the Pastoral Circle is indeed a **circle**! This indicates the cyclic nature of the process. Once we act, we then begin again, collecting the data of the experience of the action. Did our action have the intended effect? What happened? Following the circle, we end up evaluating our actions and making decisions about whether or not we should continue acting in that way, if we should change course, etc. Go to page 3 & 4 for concrete examples and a personal worksheet.

References for this article include the Courtney Carlson and A.T. Ortiz presentation on faith and justice at the 2002 CNVS conference and from "Woodstock's Way of Working: Theological Reflection" from the Woodstock Theological Forum.

PASTORAL CIRCLE

Worksheet page




HEALTHY Spring Recipes to share with others...

Mozzarella & Tomato Pasta Salad

Ingredients: 1lbs uncooked short pasta like penne or fusilli, 1/2 C olive oil, 1 tsp dried oregano, 2 C fresh tomatoes diced, 1 C basil- fresh and torn into small pieces, 1 C part-skim mozzarella cheese, one garlic clove very finely chopped (optional), salt and pepper to taste.

Directions: Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and transfer to a large bowl. Add oil, oregano and garlic and toss. Fold in tomatoes, basil and mozzarella; season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve warm or chilled. Serves 6.

Coucous Salad



Ingredients: 2 1/4 cups chicken broth, 2 cups coucous, 2/3 cup mayonnaise, 1/4 cup fresh orange juice, 2 tablespoons tomato paste, Grated rind of 1 orange, 1 to 2 tablespoons lemon juice, Salt and pepper to taste
ADD-ONS: 3 large tomatoes, seeded and chopped 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped 1/2 cup each minced fresh mint and basil leaves 1 bunch scallions, minced (include as much of the green part as possible) 1 1/2 cups currants or raisins, soaked in boiling water for 5 minutes and drained well 1 1/2 cups toasted slivered almonds or pine nuts

Directions:

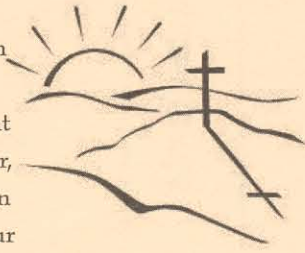
Bring the chicken broth to a boil and stir in the coucous. Let the mixture stand for 5 to 10 minutes, fluffing it occasionally with a fork. In a small bowl, mix the mayonnaise, orange juice, tomato paste, orange rind, and 1 tablespoon of the lemon juice. Add this dressing to the cooled coucous, stirring well. Chill the coucous for at least 2 hours. Taste it for seasoning; it may need salt, pepper, and more lemon juice. Serves 4-6.

The Pastoral Circle	Questions	An Example	My Example
<p>Experience—"Be Attentive!" Collect the Data</p>	<p>What is the experience in my own words? What is the experience of others involved in the situation in their own words? What do I see happening? What do I perceive with my senses?</p>	<p>At the end of my volunteer year, I am seeing that I have helped some people at the homeless shelter, but many more people remain on the streets without shelter. My supervisor says that our work is a "drop in the bucket." Many homeless people tell me that they feel ignored and invisible.</p>	
<p>Reflection—"Be Smart!" Seek to understand through Social Analysis</p> <p>And...</p>	<p>What are the social, economic, cultural, and political factors/systems that bear upon this experience? Who has power? Who is left out? Who benefits? Who is negatively affected? What do I need to know more about?</p> <p>What logical patterns do I notice emerging? What relationships exist between the data?</p>	<p>I have noticed that the present political structure seeks to cut spending for social programs in order to increase military spending and balance budgets. This is causing a scarcity of services and thus more people on the streets. I know that the un and under-employed are at greatest risk to become homeless. In the current economy, immigrants in service</p>	

<p>Theological Reflection</p>	<p>What does the Scripture, Church Doctrine, Catholic Social Teaching and the practice of the Church in response to the poor say about this situation? What comes up for me in prayer? What does my experience of God say to me about this experience? How is God inviting me to respond?</p>	<p>and thus their homes. Many do not have legal status and fear deportation. Thus, they do not have a political voice. The current political situation is focusing on closer scrutiny of immigrants, causing even more fear and marginalization. My faith tradition tells me to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry and shelter those without a home. My experience of God is that ALL people are loved infinitely and are of great worth. I must love my neighbor as myself and I deserve a safe, warm home!</p>	
<p>Make a Judgement— “Be Decisive!” Decide what is true</p>	<p>What seems to be “true” based on the above data and reflection?</p>	<p>Homeless people will continue to face tough times ahead and will have less resources to meet their basic human needs. Society has not prioritized the need to empower homeless people to achieve self-sufficiency. The gospel and Catholic Social Teaching compel me to not accept this unjust situation, as all people are God’s creations, worthy of respect and dignity. Being homeless degrades human dignity.</p>	
<p>Action—“Be Persistent!!” Implement a response</p>	<p>What are possible courses of action? Which course of action is the best response for me at this time?</p>	<p>I will continue to volunteer at a homeless shelter even after this year, as I wish to better understand the systems that impact homeless people and to advocate for change.</p>	

Easter Themes Can Bring Volunteers Hope All Year Long

The Christian tradition celebrates Easter as the high point and fulfillment of its entire liturgical year, even more important than Advent or Christmas. Our tradition encourages us to see Easter not so much as a single Sunday, such as April 20, 2003, but rather, as an experience lived throughout the whole year.



How do we know this? From a theological perspective, Lent's forty days of preparation end when we begin the *triduum* which celebrates the three days in Jesus' life. His Last Supper on Holy Thursday, with his crucifixion on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter are a single process of passion, death and rebirth. So Easter points to more than simply a holiday. The Church hereby holds up Easter as a many-faceted jewel, and encourages us to pursue how its many themes play out in our personal or communal lives. These themes celebrated during the *triduum* shed light on and bring hope to the struggles of daily life.

Use the suggestions below to help you explore how you can make this happen. Begin by thinking about or talking with others about your understanding of the various biblical themes. Then ask: how are they similar to the volunteers' experiences such as those listed as examples? Write any response you feel called to as a result of discussion. +

The Holy Thursday Experience

Be attentive to the story and read: 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Be smart in recognizing the themes: Sharing Passover meal, Breaking bread/self for others' sake, Exodus' escape from slavery, communion with God.

Be smart in recognizing similar themes in your life:

Sharing a special meal with friends? Sacrificing for another's benefit? What's your experience of slavery? When do you feel close to God?

Be decisive as to which is your concern: Perhaps share a seder meal. Is there a slavery you want or need to escape.

Your Response:

Good Friday Experience

Be attentive to the story, read: John 18:1-19,42

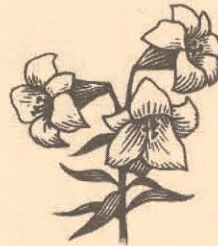
Be smart in recognizing these themes: Dealing with violence, issues of life and death, sacrifice for others.

Be decisive in recognizing similar themes in your life:

Where have you see injustice? What has enabled it to happen? Who has been the victim?

Be persistent in your response: Are your clients victims? What can be done to bring them justice?

Your Response:



The Easter Sunday Experience

Be attentive to the story, read: Mark 16: 1-8

Be smart in recognizing these themes: Changing death to life, to resurrection

Be decisive in recognizing similar themes in your life:

When have you seen new life in your own life or your clients' lives? Gone from despair to hope?

Be persistent in your response: Where is new life needed in your or your clients' lives?

Your Response:

Charity vs. Justice

"It would take one a long time to understand how systems inflict pain and hardship on people's lives and to learn that being kind in an unjust system is not enough." Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.J. *Dead Man Walking*



Your time as a volunteer, serving the poor, is something you give freely. However, you have the choice to walk away from it at anytime, and regardless of your decision -the poor will still be poor and you ... well, if you're like most volunteers - will still be relatively well-off.

Does this imply that your work is not worthy or that you shouldn't be doing it at all?

No, the work you do is good and necessary to the lives you serve. But recognizing that it does not assuage the ills of all the poor, nor give the poor everything they deserve is important. In other words, what is the difference between *charity and justice*? As David Hilfiker points out, volunteer work can make us feel good and blind us to the reasons why volunteers are needed in the first place (The Other Side, September 2000). For

example, most volunteers work for agencies to aid people who do not have their basic needs met, i.e., food, clothing, shelter and education. Yet, the agencies were not put in place to solve the problems- but rather, to provide emergency relief to an ongoing injustice.

In sum, charity is a good and a necessary practice for all Christians, but it is not everything.

How can I transform my volunteer experience into more than just charity? How can I help bring justice to those I serve? Social analysis and theological reflection help you to answer those questions. Because by being aware of the larger issues related to systemic injustice you will be on the right path towards struggling for justice.

Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers
presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Centers

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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.



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