

# SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Fourteen, Number Two

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



## TRANSFORMING CONFLICT AND OURSELVES

*A look at the transforming light of God in ourselves and others*



### Conflict Transformation

*A helpful tool for volunteers?*

Do you avoid conflict like the plague? Does just hearing the word "conflict" create a knot in your stomach or cause you to get a bit anxious? The simple truth is that most of us tend to have a rather negative view of conflict, as let's face it, dealing with conflict is plainly not fun nor easy. But have you ever noticed how no matter how hard you try to run from it, conflict always seems to catch up with you at some point or another? That is because conflict is part of the human condition. Even the Gospels tell of disagreements. Before you start running the other way, let's take a look at the concept of *conflict transformation*...

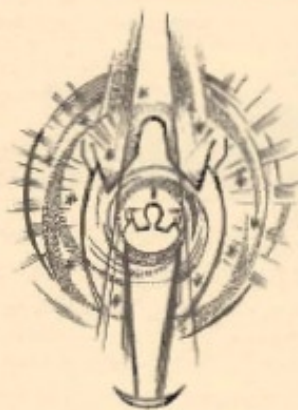
Conflict transformation begins with the premise that conflict is neither negative nor positive, but rather a part of life. It focuses on not only the immediate situation or symptoms (as in, *it drives me nuts when you leave dishes in the sink!*) but also addresses the underlying patterns, structures and issues around the conflict situation (*I feel taken advantage of in our relationship with each other*). Relationships are central in a conflict situation, since conflict flows from and returns to relationships. Conflict Transformation, then, seeks to transform relationships and their surrounding structures. For true transformation to occur, there must be a pro-active bias toward seeing conflict as a potential catalyst for growth. Change and growth occur in the transformation process that re-creates the relationship, making it more healthy and holy than it was previously. In this way, conflict can give us life, just as life gives us conflict! (*The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* by John Paul Lederach)

*See "Transformation" page 3*

### CONFLICT! "YOU LEFT THE DISHES IN THE SINK AGAIN!"

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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- Page 2- Tips for staying sane during the Christmas season.
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- Page 4- Community role play activity on conflict transformation.
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### Christmas Transformation

*How does faith transform lives?*

When you step back from the commercial hype of the Christmas season, and you think about the spiritual significance of Christ's coming, it becomes clear that transformation is at the core of Jesus' coming and his teachings.

We invite you to puzzle over the following ideas and see if you can think of ways the religious symbols in Jesus' life, in the Mass and in traditional Christmas settings tell the story of 'transformation' in people's lives. The connections may not be obvious at first.

1. "Incarnation" refers to the event of Jesus' birth 2000 years ago, but it's also a principle, referring to how divinity today becomes an integral part of humanity, and how God's kingdom of peace and justice incarnates itself in people's lives. How does your volunteer service help to transform your neighbors' lives? Perhaps bringing peace, justice, affirmation, greater dignity? To what extent do you see these developments are incarnating God's promise to humanity?

2. What are some other ways you see Jesus' Incarnation happening in your life? Are there some additional ways you give birth to Christ in others' lives? Are there ways in which your life has been transformed by those whom you serve or walk together with in your volunteer experience? What are some of the events, interactions, moments or ideas that have been the seeds for transformation in your own heart

during your time as a volunteer? How can you nurture these seeds during this Christmas season?

*See "Christmas" page 5*



# Suggestions for Staying Sane During *the Christmas Season*

Transforming the Christmas rush into a meaningful experience



**WE ALL KNOW HOW** hard it is to remain unaffected by the commercial madness that surrounds Christmas, and to be fully attentive to the meaningful moment Christmas offers us each year. For example, amid all the usual commotion: how can a volunteer stay focused on Jesus' world-transforming birth? Or on how service and the many other transcendent aspects of Christmas transform lives?

If it's possible to feel meaning and solace in the cultural symbols of Christmas (think: Christmas decorations, songs and food) then it's possible to find meaning and solace in the transcendent aspects of Christmas as well. Finding meaning in something is a choice and it's no different with Christmas. Your decisions about how you spend your time, energy and even money can help you to see the deeper significance of Christmas, turning the same-old Christmas frenzy into an occasion to experience God's transforming love in your life.

Here are some ways you can stay calm and fully present during the season. Not all of the suggestions will be for everyone- but perhaps one of them can go a long way in helping Christmas be an occasion for growth, reflection and social justice.

## Carve out your own meaningful moments

✚ Keep a journal spanning the weeks before and after Christmas, noting the differences between your past Christmases and this Christmas as a volunteer.

✚ Make a point of doing some spiritual reading each day, centered on Advent/Christmas. A few of recommendations are:

· *Watch for the Light Readings for Advent and Christmas*, a compilation of writings and poems by many spiritual authors.

· [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org) has a yearly advent and Christmas reflection booklet which can be ordered cheaply from their website.

· Use the scripture of the day to reflect on the season.

· The Benedictines of Erie, PA produce a monthly reflection newsletter that you can order by going to [www.benetvision.org](http://www.benetvision.org) (a yearly subscription costs \$15)

✚ Use a lighted candle to help you meditate. After the sun has set go into your room and light a candle. Simply watch the candle for at least 5 minutes, while letting your mind relax, let go of distractions and allow any thoughts/prayers to rise to the surface. When you

feel comfortable you can meditate on the light of God being born inside of you.

✚ Throw your own Christmas celebration, inviting friends, colleagues and the people you serve to feast together. If you serve a particular ethnic population, why not explore some of the cultural and religious Christmas traditions and incorporate them into your celebration? Ask others to bring a favorite Christmas dish. Think of alternative activities (other than gift giving) to fill the evening-- singing, storytelling, prayer service etc.

## Avoid the consumer frenzy

✚ Consider giving more creative and meaningful gifts. We have a few favorite suggestions:

~Write an affirmation letter. ~ Make a "memory jar" for a family member or close friend: Each time you think of a special memory about that person write it down on a slip of paper over the course of a week or a month. Put them all in a jar once you have a good number collected, and decorate the jar if you wish. ~ Make a memory album by collecting stories from friends and family about the person who will receive the gift.~

✚ Learn more about fair-trade giving and buy from socially conscious companies/organizations. Explore this list of great websites:

[www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)

[www.coopamerica.org](http://www.coopamerica.org)

[www.equalexchange.org](http://www.equalexchange.org)

[www.fairtradefederation.com](http://www.fairtradefederation.com)

[www.peacecraft.org](http://www.peacecraft.org)

[www.tenthousandvillages.org](http://www.tenthousandvillages.org)

[www.serv.org](http://www.serv.org)

[www.gweworld.org/](http://www.gweworld.org/) (A ministry of the Good Shepherd Sisters)

[www.altgifts.org](http://www.altgifts.org)

✚ Be aware of how your choices as a consumer affect God's creation:

Give non-material gifts like movie tickets, coupons promising to render services (babysitting, walking the dog etc.) or make edible gifts like sweets. Send e-cards and use alternative wrapping paper like newspaper or brown paper bag. Use the fronts of Christmas cards from previous years to decorate this year's gift packages.~ ✚



Here then, are some tips for putting conflict transformation into practice in your own volunteer community:

- ✓ Stop fighting! Interrupt the interaction to ask: "What's happening between us?" This will shift focus away from issues and positions to *process*.
- ✓ Identify an issue or disagreement that you would like to clarify.
- ✓ Develop and agree on a process you will use to reach your stated objective. Ask everyone to commit themselves to be unconditionally constructive.
- ✓ Gather information on different perspectives. Each person involved can express their feelings and factual information on the issue. At times you may want to include the view of someone not present or from a third party.
- ✓ Reflect on this information, summarizing areas of agreement, feelings and motivations, and areas where more work and agreement are needed.
- ✓ Search for several ways to meet the main concerns. Find at least two ways (preferably more) that address the issue and satisfy the needs of all involved. Each person can develop several ideas and then list them on paper.
- ✓ Together develop a solution and plan of action. The best resolutions are clear, written and they specify who, why, what, when, how and where. (Mark Chupp, 1992)

Some Further Ideas:

- ✓ Lay the groundwork—decide on a designated time, place and method to deal with conflict within the community.
- ✓ Seek outside help (facilitator or mediator) when conflict becomes too large for the group to handle.
- ✓ Set aside old issues and accept responsibility for your part of the conflict.
- ✓ Use supportive listening skills: paraphrasing, openness, and agreement stating. (See box on page 4.)
- ✓ Use assertive speaking skills: use of I-messages, preference stating, purpose stating. (See box on page 4.)
- ✓ Understand the interests behind your position (the "why" behind your "want").
- ✓ Know which interests are most important to you.
- ✓ Be supportive and acknowledge others' feelings.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to agree and make appropriate concessions.
- ✓ Focus on the here and now: be specific and don't globalize the dispute. ✚



### *Recipes to warm up volunteers on those dark winter nights*

*two classic Italian soup recipes that are vegetarian, healthy and warm!*



#### **LENTIL SOUP, serves 4**

*3 cups dry lentils, 6 tablespoons olive oil, 1/2 chopped red onion, 3 thinly sliced cloves of garlic plus 2 whole cloves, 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth (made by boiling a bouillon cube in water), 1 small can of tomato paste, salt and pepper, 1 cup dry pasta shells*

Wash and drain the lentils, carefully picking through them to take out any pebbles.

In a saucepan, heat the oil until hot. Add the onions and sliced garlic. Cook until softened but not brown. Add the lentils and the hot broth. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for about 40 minutes, adding water if necessary to keep the level of water just above the lentils. Add the pasta shells during the last 6 minutes of cooking. Then add the tomato paste and season with salt and pepper to taste. Goes well with garlic bread.

#### **PASTA E FAGIOLI (PASTA AND BEANS), serves 8**

*3 tablespoons olive oil, 1 onion chopped, 2 cloves minced garlic, 1 29 oz. can tomato sauce, 5 1/2 cups water, 1 tablespoon dried parsley, 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil, 1 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano, salt to taste, 1 can of cannellini beans, 1 can of navy beans, 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese and 1 pound of ditalini or macaroni pasta*

In a large pot over medium heat, cook onion in olive oil until translucent. Stir in garlic and cook until tender. Reduce heat, and stir in tomato sauce, water, parsley, basil, oregano, salt, cannellini beans, navy beans and Parmesan. Simmer 1 hour.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add pasta and cook for 8 to 10 minutes then drain. Stir into soup. Enjoy with warm bread and follow with hot chocolate!



## An Exercise: For Transforming Conflicts into Relationships

This activity involves role playing a conflict situation typical among volunteer communities. It takes about 20 minutes minimum and you need 2 or more participants. During the activity community members will role play conflict situations, first showing ways they could go wrong and then how to make discussions go right. The purpose is to develop a few communication skills while dealing with personal differences and to have some fun while learning.

### Directions:

✓ Designate who will play the following parts: *the Problem-Causer, the Offended-Person, the Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party.*

✓ Choose a conflict situation which is not too close to home (i.e. that is not a veiled attempt to deal with a current situation).

Here are some options:

- Someone often leaves dirty dishes in sink overnight (which draws bugs and is odoriferous).
- One community member regularly misses community activities due to outside events.
- Cynic in community occasionally makes fun of other people's religious values and practices.
- Materialistic person tends to violate the spirit of simple living.

✓ Now, as a group, go over the "ground rules" (See adjacent box.) After you've done that, you're ready to role play.

✓ **First run through** (demonstrates how to make conflict transformation very difficult)

The Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party describes the conflict in as dispassionate a manner as possible and the Problem-Causer follows by artistically acting out the part. Then have the Offended-Person over-react to the problem and give voice to his/her complaint.

The Problem-Causer should react to the complaint going against all of the ground rules for conflict transformation, and the Offended-Person should react in a similar manner, with exchanges continuing between the two persons.

In the end the Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party should step in and invite each role player to say how he/she felt playing the role. Then Neutral-Person summarizes what he/she heard take place.

✓ **Second run through** (demonstrates how to lay a foundation for conflict transformation)

Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party describes the conflict in as dispassionate manner as possible and the Problem-Causer acts out his/her part. Offended-Person then responds to the problem and gives voice to his/her complaint with the Problem-Causer using active listening skills and assertive speaking skills (ground rules). Verbal

exchanges continue between both persons and then the Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party steps in and invites each role player to say how they felt playing the role. Then Neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> Party summarizes what he/she heard take place.

If helpful, choose the best solution and develop a specific plan of action: when this happens in the future, then X, Y, and Z will happen (who, what, when, where).

Optional: Choose another situation and use the same roles as above. Enjoy.



"Please, no karate allowed in conflict transformation!"

## Ground Rules for Conflict Transformation

### Use Assertive Speaking Skills

1. Know and state your purpose clearly.
2. Use "I" statements. For example: don't say: 'you drive me nuts when you . . . .' Instead say something like: 'When I'm trying to get to sleep at night and feel my bed shaking in rhythm to your boom box, I feel . . .' or, 'When I find the dishes in the kitchen sink in the morning, I feel as though....'
3. State your preferences.
4. Also, avoid assuming that you and your adversary have different values.

### Use Active Listening Skills

1. Invite the other person(s) to share their feelings about the situation, including the feelings of the person(s) who leaves the dishes in the sink or plays music loudly.
2. After each person has his or her say, have one person summarize that person's feelings, in order to reflect them back to the speaker to make sure that everyone has heard them accurately.
3. Ask: What are the areas of agreement (feelings, values, motivations).
4. Ask: What are the areas where more agreement is needed?
5. Ask: What are some possible ways to meet the needs of all parties involved?
6. Look for ways to create a win-win conclusion, rather than put down any participant.



3. Sometimes biblical symbols open up new ways of seeing life. For example, what is the first miracle John's gospel attributes to Jesus? Hint/Suggestion: Read John 2: 1-9 which tells the story of Cana. Note that John's gospel is the only one which begins with this miracle as Jesus' first miracle. So John must see transformation as somehow a key for understanding Jesus' life and ministry.



4. At Mass during the preparation of the gifts, the priest mixes water with the wine. But what is the meaning behind this? Hint: Consider the short prayer the priest quietly says while he does this: "By the mystery/mixing of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." The prayer celebrates our awareness that in Christ we have an intimacy of divinity with humanity. When we partake of the Eucharist, divinity somehow emerges and dwells within our humanity, and is another form of incarnation.

5. What are some ways in which the following contrasting symbols and forces are at work at Christmas time transforming lives: Light vs. Darkness; Peace vs. Violence; Heaven meeting with Earth; Divinity with Humanity; Wealth with Poverty? One by one, take each pair of contrasts and unpack their meaning. For example, for light/darkness, Christmas lights signify Christ as the light of the world coming to darkness at the darkest time of winter (21 Dec.). Where's the light or signs of hope in today's world? What threatens to overshadow the light?

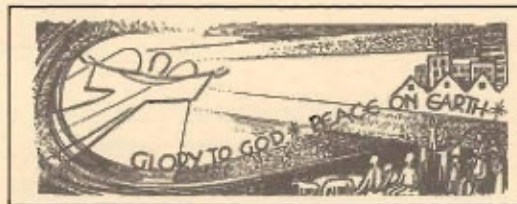
6. What were some of your family's Christmas traditions which may have helped you or your family members to experience positive changes in their lives? That gave you or them a sense of hope?

7. The evergreen Christmas tree represents God's promise of eternal life. What are some ways this is similar to Jesus' cross? Hint: Read Acts of the Apostles 5:30 which calls Jesus' cross the 'tree.' What other religious symbols are associated with the Christmas tree? How do they speak to transformation and hope? (e.g. see Genesis 2:17)

8. Sometimes principles are a key for unlocking meanings. Try to unpack the following religious principle. Theologians affirm that when Jesus was born, humanity and creation were transformed by his birth. What are some implications this principle could have for your spirituality? For your understanding of yourself as an agent of change? As a vehicle of the incarnation? For social justice? Suggestion: read 1 Corinthians 15:45 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Finally, what other transformative aspects or symbols do you see in the Christmas experience? ✚

*Theologians affirm that when Jesus was born, humanity and creation were transformed by his birth. What are some implications this principle could have for your spirituality?*



It might be easy to run away to a monastery, away from the commercialization, the hectic hustle, the chaotic world around us.

Then we would have a holy Christmas. But we would forget the lesson of the Incarnation, of the enfleshing of God—the lesson that we who are followers of Jesus do not run away from the secular; rather we embrace it and, in doing so, transform it.

It is our mission to make holy the secular aspects of life...by being holy people...

*Published with permission of the author*

Rev. Andrew Greeley



## Biblical Reflection *Christmas Celebrates Our Challenge: To Share Cultures*

Israel at the time of Jesus' birth and throughout his lifetime was a mixing bowl of foreign cultures. Recall the Pentecost story in Acts 2:6 which notes: "there were devout men (any women?) living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven," and Acts then names over 15 different languages. Furthermore, when the Jewish Christians 'published' the New Testament's epistles and gospels, all were written in Greek, rather than in Hebrew or Aramaic. Jesus' followers clearly had to adapt to the other cultures.

In one sense, this diversity of cultures is at the heart of the mystery of Jesus' birth: an integration of the human and divine cultures, what the scientist-theologian Teilhard de Chardin called the "divine milieu." For each disciple, this mixing becomes the life-long personal effort called developing one's

*spirituality*. For each volunteer it is also a challenge.

Some volunteers, when they return home to their family at Christmas, or afterwards at reentry, feel as if they are departing their newfound volunteer culture of simple-living and returning to a familiar but slightly foreign family culture of complex-living. The challenge is to know the strengths and limits of one's own culture, respect the differences with other cultures and learn to adapt and integrate the best of both worlds. This also will nurture one's spirituality, and it's very practical. Imagine next Christmas, for example, if you were to bring home to meet your family a 'significant other' who was also culturally diverse. Think about it and enjoy your Christmas challenge. ✚



## *Shared Visions*

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©2003 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center Volume 14, Number 2

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## The mission of the St. 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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