

# SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 17, Number 3

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

## How to Be More Open to Your Volunteer Experience: Balancing Respect for Authority and Self-Esteem

This third issue in our four-part series on becoming a more openminded person shines the spotlight on “balance” as a key characteristic of this process. In particular, the openminded person balances respect for authority outside the self with respect for one’s own personal sense of authority. In contrast, the closedminded person makes authority into an absolute and concentrates it either in oneself or in another person, group or ideology. As a result, the closedminded person prematurely closes down the process of thinking and judging the truthfulness of one’s understanding because he or she already has the answer.

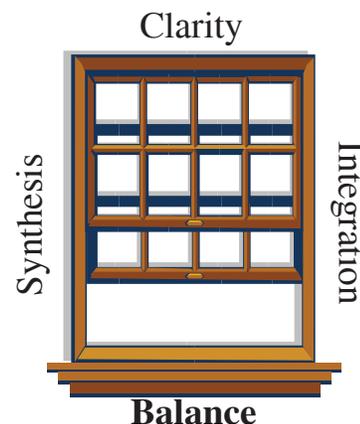
This quality, “balance,” also applies to how the individual handles self-esteem. If the person has too little self-esteem or too much self-esteem, it can become an obstacle to dealing objectively with the real world. This is why the person with low self-esteem could be vulnerable by needing to pay attention to their own ego needs.



The classic Broadway play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, illustrates this challenge to find a balance between the authoritative wisdom of the past and the personal needs of the present. The play’s logo is the fiddler who maintains his balance while standing on a slanted roof. The idea is that each of us needs to work at balancing the wisdom of the past, tradition, with the needs of the present. Put differently, we need

to balance the traditional authority of the past with the concerns of today.

These two concerns, how you relate to authority and to self-esteem, are keys which can help you to become a more open person, more open to those around you, to volunteer service and to God. The activities and articles in this third issue of *Shared Visions* are geared to help you balance your approach to authority and to self-esteem, two gatekeepers for opening the mind and heart. We hope you enjoy this issue, whether as an individual or community.



### Imagine, if you will...

#### Imagine You’re An Authority Figure



What if you were magically transformed into an authority figure for one 24-hour period. In what field would you want to be an authority? What would you want to accomplish during that day? What in your real life, if anything, is keeping you from taking steps toward becoming such an authority?

#### Imagine You Have The Perfect Balance of Self-Esteem

Everybody respects you, and even you respect you and there’s no baggage holding you back. What does this feel like for you? Now think about your real life situation. How, if at all, is this different from your having no self-esteem problems?



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# Understanding Balance

This third in our four-part series emphasizes “balance” as a key characteristic describing the open mind. The idea is that the open mind respects authority not only in oneself but also in others. Each needs to be respected and balanced with one another. In contrast, the closed mind absolutizes one’s own authority or that of others. This overconfidence prematurely closes down the process of thinking and judging the truthfulness of one’s understanding.



Similarly, with regard to self-esteem, a person can err by giving oneself either too little or too much self-esteem. So whether the issue is authority or self-esteem, if a person fixates on who has authority or constantly attends to self-esteem issues, this distracts the person from dealing with the real world and thoughtfully making decisions.

## The Open Person:

## The Closed Person:

Maintains a balanced view, seeing authority as being in one’s own domain as well as being the prerogative of others.	Goes to extremes with regard to authority, locating it either totally within oneself or totally in others.
Respects others as having some authority but does not make others into absolute authority figures.	Respects the authority of others to an extreme degree and exalts others to a status of being unquestionable.
Maintains a balanced view, seeing oneself as worthy of esteem as well as respecting others as also worthy of esteem.	Goes to extremes with regard to giving oneself or others too much esteem.
Does not allow his or her need for greater self-esteem to push one to aggrandize oneself or others.	Tends to make oneself or others into heroes, larger than real life, and then does not question their judgments.
Does not allow his or her need for greater self-esteem to distract from the concerns and priorities of one’s situation.	Allows his or her need for greater self-esteem to distract from the real concerns and priorities of one’s situation.

## Being Open to God: Unc

As human beings we all have an ego, which serves an essential function in how we develop self-esteem. However, we live in a society of such extremes that having too much of anything, even of self-esteem, can easily become an obstacle to our dealing objectively with the real world and our roles in it. Here are some questions to help you evaluate if your ego is throwing you off balance or if you are placing too much emphasis on your need to control the world. Reflect on your responses to the following questions.

- How do you react when a client’s situation worsens and you cannot do anything to change the outcome?
- How do you feel when a co-worker or member of your volunteer community seems more successful at work than you?

- How is your self-esteem affected when you make a mistake?
- In your current work as a volunteer, do you find yourself longing to be back in college or old job where everything made more sense?
- Part of the challenge of living in a community is that each member brings with them their own approach to making life decisions. Some volunteers are vegetarians or vegans. Others are dedicated to living simply by cutting out T.V. or not shopping for new clothes. How do you reconcile that not everyone will make the same choices as you?

**“To become more present, v  
inner spaciousness; then we  
intelligence and clarity, with  
less of our agenda in the wa**

# Activity: Draw Your Self-Esteem Life Map

Everybody has good days and bad days, times when your sense of your own worth might rise or fall somewhat based on whether people praise or blame you, give you a smile or ignore you. Those situation-specific triggers come from outside you and although important, they are secondary and usually not as significant as your ongoing, general self-esteem you generate from within. In this Life-Map activity, we encourage you to think about your ongoing self-esteem that comes from within you.

## Directions:

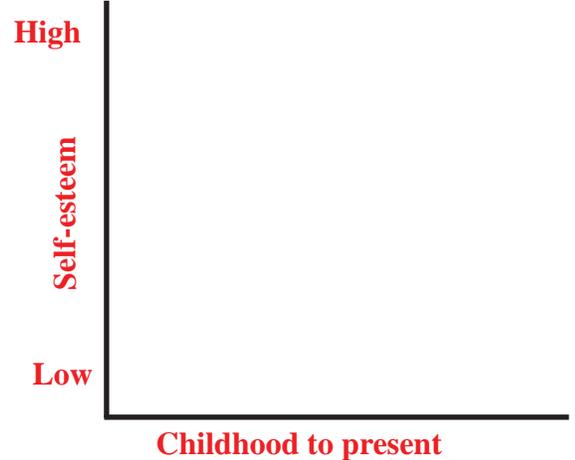
→ The goal is to create a graph with the horizontal line representing your life's timeline from your childhood years up to the present. The vertical line represents levels of your self-esteem, from low to high, which you had at those times.

→ For your earlier years, recall a few key people in your life and how they treated you. Use a dot for each significant person and place it according to whether the relationship encouraged you to have high or low levels of self-esteem.

→ For your junior or senior high school years, recall a few key events, perhaps whether or not you were part of the in-crowd in 7th grade, or made it onto a soccer team in 10th grade, getting into the college of your choice as a senior. Again, place a dot higher or lower depending on how the event influenced your esteem.

→ Now reflect on when you were in college and beyond, and place a few dots representing how you felt about yourself based on your own sense of identity.

→ Now connect all these dots making a line charting your general sense of self-esteem.



## Follow-up Questions:

1. In general, is your self-esteem high, moderate or low and to what extent are you surprised by what your graph tells you?
2. To what extent are your decisions and actions influenced by the level of your self-esteem?
3. To what extent are your experiences as a volunteer colored by your self-esteem needs, if at all?
4. In what way does your self-esteem affect the way you relate to God?
5. To the extent you feel comfortable doing so, share your answers with your fellow volunteers.

Caution: internally derived self-esteem is difficult to change. Be wary of trying to "fix" somebody by heaping on praise or to fix yourself by trying to accomplish an extraordinarily difficult event.

## covering Your True Self

During your reflection, did any of the following themes surface: control, power, competition, fixation on the past? Spiritual writer Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, in Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer, describes these issues as part of ego. The problem is not ego in and of itself, but rather letting our egos be the guiding forces in our lives. This is not to say that having an ego makes us egotistical. Oftentimes it is just too easy to become fixated on the controlling and

we must reach into a deep  
e can speak with more  
h a little less ego, and with  
ay." (p. 62)

competitive elements of ego. We want to be able to fix our client's problems. We want to feel successful and avoid making mistakes.

We want to live in the past where we already know the outcome. We want to make good moral choices. There is nothing wrong with having these desires. The

challenge is to avoid letting them cloud what Fr. Rohr calls our 'true self.'

Simply put, ego shuts out God. Fr. Rohr urges us to let go of our false-self in order to make room for God. The goal is to learn how to let go of this false sense of reality and let our true self guide the way. This is where we can find true openness to God.

This process of examining your ego and living your true self can sound a bit complex. But this path starts with the simple call to contemplation. By living for the present moment, we can create more space for God, which invites harmony and balance into our lives.

Rohr, Richard. Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer. Crossroad General Interest, 2003.

## Biblical Reflection: Christ Calls Us to Balance

“Then he (Christ) opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). But just how did he open their minds? By calling the disciples to “balance.”

This sentence comes at the very end of St. Luke’s gospel during the risen Christ’s final meeting with his disciples on the day of his ascension into heaven. The story illustrates the disciples’ conviction that Jesus fulfills and brings to perfection two very different expressions of God’s presence, namely “the law of Moses and the Prophets” (Luke 24:44).

This text exemplifies one of the main thoughts behind this issue of *Shared Visions*: the open mind balances respect for authority, such as the law, with, at the same time, respect for the individual, such as the prophet.

The term “the law of Moses” refers to the first five books of the bible, the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), which contain the extensive body of Jewish laws to which faithful Jews



were intensely loyal. It externally embodied God’s laws. The New Testament teaches that Christ fulfilled this ancient sacred law and replaced it with himself as the new law of love (Galatians 5: 13).

Along with the law, the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, were also central to Jewish faith. Christ fulfilled their message as well. Often there is considerable tension between the law and the prophets. The law was written down and followed rigidly. The prophets, on the other hand, were highly spirited individuals who often reminded kings and law keepers what their real purpose was. Saint Paul often wrote of this difference between the letter and the spirit, between legalisms and prophetic spirit (Romans 7:6).

Some young adults have said they swing back and forth between legalism and free-floating spirituality. What Christ told his disciples and urges us today is to strive for religious openness which balances the law with the prophetic spirit, balances respect for external authority with respect for the spirit behind each law. By calling us to this balance, Christ opens our minds so we can be responsive to the needs of our world and supportive of the coming of the reign of God.

## Are You “Just a Volunteer”?

Circle the number closest to how YOU see yourself:

10 ----- 9 ----- 8 ----- 7 ----- 6 ----- 5 ----- 4 ----- 3 ----- 2 ----- 1 ----- 0  
Super Volunteer Average Volunteer Lowly Volunteer



Go back to the above scale and circle how OTHERS see you (specify who they are).

Have you ever thought or said the following phrases, or ones like them?  
“I don’t know [the answer...how to do this job...etc.], I’m just a volunteer.”  
“Well, it doesn’t matter [what I think...if I’m included...etc.], I’m just a volunteer.”



Thinking of yourself as “just a volunteer” negatively impacts your self-esteem as well as the general attitude and culture of your organization. This mindset is often quite common, and is also impacted by how others see and treat you. Entering into volunteer service does not indicate incapability, a lack of intelligence or competency, or diminished importance. As intelligent, outstanding individuals, you know that! Yet many volunteers, when asked a question to which they do not have the answer, or when asked what they do for an organization, respond: “I’m just a volunteer.” How can you combat the “just a volunteer” attitude?

### Reducing the attitude in yourself:

- If you find yourself using the phrase “just a volunteer”...just stop!
- Start referring to yourself and your work by what you actually do. Examples: caseworker, teacher, home builder, etc.
- Always keep the big picture in mind. Any task that you do - big or small, lesson planning or envelope stamping - contributes to a greater good.

### Reducing the attitude in others:

- When talking to others, always project a positive image of yourself and the work you do.
- Others will take your work seriously if you take your work seriously.
- Ask others to stop using the phrase; it’s inaccurate and diminishes your contribution!

## *Self-Evaluation: Taking Yourself Lightly...*

A popular saying from the author G.K. Chesterton reminds us, "Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly." While this quote may seem whimsical, it contains real wisdom. If you have ever met persons who take themselves too seriously, you know that they often pay most attention to their own thoughts and needs, and that they can be rigid and inflexible. Now, it is also possible to take oneself too lightly, and therefore to devalue the worth of one's own opinions. Someone with an ideal balance recognizes the value of his or her own thoughts and needs, but is also sensitive to their current situation and to the people around them. As a volunteer, do you take yourself too seriously or too lightly? Do you have a balance between the two?

Look at the categories shown on the chart below. Think about your expectations for your volunteer job site (To save the world?), for your volunteer community (To find lifelong friends?), or for your volunteer experience in general (To become a new person?). What types of challenges have you encountered in all aspects of the experience? Most importantly, how have you responded to these challenges? Using the chart below as a resource, write down your reflections for each category.

	<b>WORKPLACE</b>	<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<b>GENERAL</b>
<b>EXPECTATIONS</b>			
<b>CHALLENGES</b>			
<b>RESPONSES</b>			

Look for patterns in the way that you react when confronted with new situations or challenges. What do your reactions say about the way you value yourself? Do you take yourself too lightly, or too seriously? For example, are you willing to be a 'team player' when working with a group, or do you try to dominate group discussions and decisions? Do you consider the thoughts and needs of others as well as your own? Finding the right balance will help you to "fly" during your time as a volunteer, and in life.

### ***Activity: How Do You Relate to Authority Figures in Your Life?***

Here's a short activity that could give you some insight into how you relate to authority figures in your life. It focuses on your current job supervisor, but you could begin anywhere, with past employers, teachers or parents.

Few things color your experiences as a volunteer more than how you get along with your supervisor. Which of the following volunteers most resembles you?

**Volunteer #1:** *"I love my boss. She gives me a project and sets me free to get it done."*

**Volunteer #2:** *"My boss is a mixed bag because I like some qualities but others are a drag."*

**Volunteer #3:** *"It's a pain for me to go to my placement site because I feel discounted by my supervisor and I don't seem to be making a difference in others' lives."*



**To consider:**

1. Take a moment to write your own sentence describing how you relate to your boss. How does this relationship impact your feelings about yourself?
2. Think about some other bosses or teachers you have had. How would you describe your relationship with them? To what extent was your respect mutual?
3. What pattern, if any, can you find in how you relate to authority? Do you tend to emphasize your own authority or that of others? Is it a balance?

## Recipe(s) for a Good Time: Balanced Diets

Since this issue deals with balance, how's your diet? It can be difficult to balance varying tastes, dietary preferences, and a limited budget while living in community. To help you out, we've assembled five "balanced" week-night menus from the Recipe Box on our website ([http://www.pallotticenter.org/Current/RecipeOfTheWeek/recipe\\_archives.htm](http://www.pallotticenter.org/Current/RecipeOfTheWeek/recipe_archives.htm)). As a bonus, there is a weekend brunch menu, too! The recipes are found under the menu heading in parentheses. Bon appétit!

### Menu 1

Grilled Chicken with Soy-Lime Sauce (Meats)  
Liberation Vegetables (Soups & Sides)  
side of sourdough or french bread

### Menu 2

Tuna Macaroni Casserole (Vegetarian and Seafood Main Dishes)  
Citrus Salad (Salad)  
Easy-to-Make Brownies (Dessert)



### Menu 3

Pocket to 'em! (Meats)  
Italian Avocado and Walnut Salad (Salad)  
Lemon Curd (Dessert)

### Menu 4

Potato Dill Soup (Soups & Sides)  
Chicken and Broccoli Caesar Salad (Salad)  
Mile High Apple Pie (Dessert)

### Menu 5

White Bean Hummus (Soups & Sides)  
fresh vegetables for dipping  
Super-Food-Healthy Stir Fry (Vegetarian and Seafood Main Dishes)  
side of brown rice

### Menu 6

Spinach Eggs (Breakfast)  
Lemon-Poppy Seed Muffins (Dessert)  
Watermelon Basket Fruit Salad (Holiday Cooking - April)

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Volume 17 , Number 3

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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; St. Louis; and Oakland, CA. 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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