

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 18, Number 4

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

Saying Goodbye and Preparing for the Future: Making Sense of Transitions

For many volunteer programs, late spring through the early summer ushers in a period of transition. Whether you are completing year one of two years, leaving your program after your one year commitment has ended, or staying on with your program for an indefinite period of time, the staff of the Pallotti Center wishes you well and hopes that the activities and reflections in this final issue of this volume of **Shared Visions** help you to take stock and make sense of your time of service.



It can be very useful to consider the impact you've had through your placement and role in your community, and to note the impact that your community and your clients or students have had on you. Reflect on which ideas, lessons, themes, and inspirations transcend the world of your volunteer program and can be carried with you and applied to the numerous paths you will take from here forward.

As always, we welcome feedback on this issue or any others at sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org. Happy transitioning!

Activity: Creating a Community Time Capsule

Creating a time capsule could be an ideal way for you and your community to ritualize your goodbyes this spring. If your capsule had room for only a certain number of photos, T-shirts, and stories or personal reflections, what would make the cut? What do you want future generations of volunteers to know about your experience as a volunteer in 2007-08? What do you want to remember? Conversely, what stories are too personal, embarrassing or painful to share with posterity?



community could pool its resources and buy one together. On one of your final community nights together, gather in a circle with the capsule in the middle. One by one, go around the circle and ask each person to explain the meaning of his or her contribution to the capsule. Add each item in turn, include a note that tells future generations about your community, invite everyone to sign his or her name and sing or play a song of farewell (the Matchbox Twenty song discussed elsewhere in this issue or another of your choosing) as you bury

A quick Google search revealed time capsules being sold online for as little as \$15.95.

If you want to bury your capsule, perhaps your

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Continuing the Journey: A Reflection for Those Remaining in Volunteer Service

During the summer months, many volunteers will leave their placement sites and communities to forge new paths: returning home, moving to a new city, beginning a new job, going back to school, and others. Many volunteers, however, will continue on with their program for another year (or more!) or begin service with a different volunteer program. If you are in this category, be prepared for a different transition than what your friends leaving the program will face.

As seasoned volunteers in the field, you know a lot about community living, making ends meet on a small budget, and serving your clients or students well. It is tempting to fall back on all you've learned and share your knowledge and experience with your new community or community members. It's helpful to remember that these new community members come in with fresh eyes and will learn things on their own as you did. How can you continue in your service with a set of fresh eyes?

One way is to practice humility. In colloquial terms, being humble is often portrayed as being quiet and meek. Theologian and popular writer Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, states that, "We tend to think of humility as self-effacement, self-depreciation, as never blowing our own horn, as always first waiting to be asked before we step forward to offer our gifts. We identify humility with non-assertiveness." To the

contrary, he discusses how our gifts are designed to help and serve God, others, and ourselves, and that "We are humble when we live in the face of the fact that we are both dependent and interdependent."

The following questions are designed to help you put your gifts and goals into words.

- *What have you learned and accomplished in the past year (or more) of service?*
- *Part of real humility is recognizing your God-given gifts and talents. In what areas of community living or your work do you excel? What can you contribute to your new or continued community?*
- *We all have room to grow, and, usually, not enough time to do all that we hope to accomplish. What are some areas in which you'd like to grow in your new or continued community?*
- *What are some things that you'd like to accomplish or try in this next phase of your volunteer service? How do you see your new community helping you to fulfill your goals?*

Consider filling in the following chart to help you sort out your desires, gifts, and areas of growth potential. If you are leaving your volunteer program, you can still use this chart to help you with the next phase of your life.

	For _____ I hope:	For _____ I can provide:	From _____ I hope to learn:
Myself			
My new community/new community members			
My work experience			
My clients/students			

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the capsule in your back yard or otherwise put it aside for future volunteers.

As an alternative, if you and your community want to take your capsule with you, write down or otherwise

symbolize your treasures and make a copy for each of you to take with you.

We hope this ritual will help you think about your own contributions to your community during the past year, as well as the contributions of your community to those who come after you.

Biblical Reflection: Volunteers! Feel Your Work is Unfinished? Help is Coming!

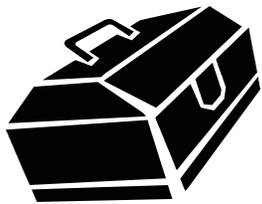
Many volunteers complete their term of service at the beginning of summer, and some feel tugged in different directions. Along with the tasks of “saying goodbye” to housemates and clients, and learning to tell your story, there are spiritual challenges as well. For example, some volunteers sense their work is unfinished and so have feelings of guilt knowing they will soon be leaving their placement site. They may think, “I wanted to make a significant difference but these people continue to need my help.”

The writer of the last gospel, John, dealt with a related question and described how Jesus handled it in his farewell discourse to the disciples. The setting was toward the end of the Last Supper. Jesus told them he was leaving, and the disciples were confused as to why he had to go after being with them such a short time. They felt his departure was premature (John 14). Similarly, volunteers and missionaries, at the end of their term of service, have to tell their students and clients that they will not be back next year. This is a difficult message to give as well as to hear.

How did Jesus handle it? In part, he did so by encouraging the disciples to focus on the bigger picture. He was the Way, the Truth and the Life (14: 6), and they needed to draw strength from his actions and teachings. Further, Jesus was sending the Holy Spirit (14: 16) to continue to teach the disciples in his absence. The challenge for volunteers is to avoid focusing on themselves, seeing themselves as messiahs and making their students and clients dependent on them. Rather, volunteers do well to help their students and clients keep their eyes on the prize: the bigger picture of Jesus’ life and teachings.

At the same time, it is a comfort for volunteers to know that new volunteers will come to this placement site to take up where they left off. As the Holy Spirit continued the healing presence of Jesus, new volunteers will continue the process of helping those with whom you and your housemates have worked this past year or years. It’s a beautiful portrait, an unbroken succession of laborers coming to the vineyard, each incarnating another aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work among us. Unless you go, there may not be room for fresh recruits to arrive. You are a part of this beautiful larger picture, where each person contributes the best of what he or she is able to do.

- How am I doing getting ready to transition from my volunteer community?
- To what extent do I feel that my work is unfinished, and how am I handling this?
- From what spiritual vision am I encouraging my clients to draw strength?
- How am I going to help those I worked with focus on the “Big Picture” of Jesus after I am gone?



Completing your term of volunteer service? The Pallotti Center offers a variety of free services to former volunteers, available through our website: www.pallotticenter.org (click on Former Volunteers).

If you cannot access this information on the web, please feel free to call us at 1-877-VOL-LINK. Here is a brief summary of the resources for you:

- **Network of Former Volunteers** - The Network is a listserv of former volunteers all over

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the U.S. and the world. Former volunteers can **use the listserv to find others who have volunteered in their area, program, or field of interest; to find and share advice or leads about housing, jobs, or graduate study; to promote social justice interests; and to schedule gatherings of former volunteers in their area.** There are also several regional listservs for which you can sign up.

- **“What’s Next?” Notebook** - This annual publication addresses issues encountered in the post-service stage of volunteering, and **helps to guide your transition out of volunteer service.**

How Far Have You Come?



What song is playing on your ipod right now? Matchbox Twenty has a song out called "How Far We've Come" that might make sense to you at the end of your year of volunteer service. The song presents an apocalyptic vision that might leave some listeners wondering if all hope is lost, but at its best the song conveys a certain restlessness and a sense of fear that might seem very real to you as you face an unsure future. Could you see yourself singing along to these lyrics as you wake up on the final day of your volunteer year?

*I'm waking up at the start of the end of the world,
but its feeling just like every other morning before,
Now I wonder what my life is going to mean if it's gone,*

What will your life mean without being able to claim the identity of being a volunteer associated with a particular agency or a particular religious order? Will that seem like the end of your world in some ways? And will anyone else notice your absence, or will it seem just like another day to them?

*The cars are moving like a half a mile an hour if that,
and started staring at the passengers who're waving goodbye
can you tell me what was ever really special about me all this time?*

Hopefully, you will hear a lot about the special, unique contributions you have made to the work of your agency and the life of your volunteer community as you begin to say goodbye. Affirmations are an important ritual as you take leave of each other. Like the songwriter, you might feel that time is slowing to a standstill as you share these final minutes together.

*well it was cool cool, it was just all cool
now it's over for me and it's over for you*

"It was cool." How many times have we said that about a concert or a party we attended? It's become so commonplace that it's a phrase almost devoid of meaning. What will we tell others about our time of volunteer service? Was it cool? Or was it so profoundly more than that, so much so that it will be hard to find words to adequately describe it for many months to come?

let's see how far we've come

What will be the measure of how far we have come during our year of volunteer service? Our passion for justice? Our love for God and neighbor? Our willingness to live simply? Our gratitude for all who made this time possible and memorable?

Lyrics are included for educational purposes only. Visit www.matchboxtwenty.com for ordering information.



Tools ...Designed for You!

- **Staying Connected** - Each issue of this free newsletter focuses on an aspect of volunteering (simple living, social justice, spirituality, relationships, etc.) and how that can apply to life after service.

- **Job Bank** - The Job Bank aids former volunteers in the search for meaningful and fulfilling work. You can sign up for the Job Bank, emailed weekly, and also review articles, links, and strategies for career discernment and job searching.

- **Resources in Your Area** - Wondering what current and former volunteers are up to in your neck of the woods? Have a great resource to share with others? The Pallotti Center has compiled a list of monthly former volunteer gatherings, parishes where formers attend, retreat opportunities, peace and justice organizations, volunteer opportunities, and other valuable resources. Also browse the Former Volunteer Resource Contacts in your area to find former volunteers who are willing to organize gatherings or help you with the transition to a new area.

Activity: Updating Your Mission Statement



At the beginning of this year of volunteer service (see *Shared Visions* vol. 18, no. 1), we asked you to create two mission statements: one for yourself, and one for your volunteer community. Through that exercise, you reflected on your own ideals and objectives, and compared them with those of your volunteer program and your community members. As you near the end of your time of volunteer service, take some time to reevaluate both mission statements. The following questions are suggestions for how you and your community members might reflect on your work and accomplishments of the past year.

- Ask your community members to what extent they feel that they lived up to the ideals highlighted in your community mission statement. Why or why not?
- To what extent have you lived up to your personal mission statement? Again, why or why not?
- What changes, if any, would you make to the mission statements you drafted this past fall?
- Were your expectations realistic? Did you and your community fall short of your expectations, or did you surpass them? Explain your answers.

After reflecting on the mission statements for your volunteer experience, turn your thoughts to the future. What will be your next step at the end of this summer? Whether you start a new job, go to graduate school, or stay on for another year of volunteer work, the upcoming year holds a new set of challenges for you. Now is a good time to prepare yourself for those challenges.



How will your current life decisions be informed by Gospel values, and by your experiences as a volunteer? Just as you did at the beginning of your volunteer experience, write a personal mission statement that will serve both as a guide and a source of encouragement for your goals for the coming year.

We wish you the best as you continue to live out your mission!

Crafting Your Volunteer "Bucket List"

Have you seen a recent movie called "The Bucket List"? It's the story of two men from very different backgrounds who share only a terminal cancer diagnosis and a quest to complete a common "to-do" list before they "kick the bucket."

With your time of volunteer service coming to an end, you might consider creating your own version of the bucket list as one way of reflecting on and prioritizing your upcoming goodbyes. **What do you want to accomplish before the year ends? Is there anything or anyone keeping you sidetracked from these goals? What kind of support will you need from the members of your program, friends and family to help you complete your list?**

The characters that Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman play in the movie share more than an adventure. They come

to discover that their shared journey helps to restore their will to live, which may not have been the case if each man filled out his list in isolation. As they come to know each other, they also discover that there is not that much that divides the Fortune 500 entrepreneur (Nicholson) and the auto mechanic who dropped out of college years ago to start a family (Freeman).



You might also think of whom you would invite to take this bucket list adventure with you. Will it be a fellow volunteer in your program? A client at your work site? Someone particularly close to you, or someone who has remained mostly a stranger over the past months?

May this exercise help you grow closer to each other and to your heart's desire.

Resources for further reading. . .



For the final issue of this year, we present the resources referenced throughout this issue, as well as some other books, articles, and a song that may be helpful as you transition.

Bolles, Richard Nelson. What Color is Your Parachute? 2008: A Practical Manual for Job-hunters and Career-Changers. 2007.

Bridges, William. Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, Revised 25th

Anniversary Edition. 2004.

Claiborne, Shane. The Irresistable Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical. 2006.

From Mission to Mission. This organization provides materials and workshops for individuals who volunteered cross-culturally. www.missiontomission.org

Matchbox Twenty, "How Far We've Come," from the album "Exile on Mainstream." 2007. More information can be found at:

www.matchboxtwenty.com.

Rolheiser, Ronald. "Real and False Humility." Archived column; located at: http://www.ronrolheiser.com/columnarchive/search_detail.hp?rec_id=314

Rupp, Joyce. Praying Our Goodbyes. 1988.

Wuthnow, Robert. After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion. 2007.

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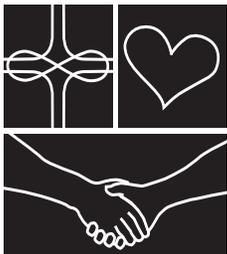
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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

The mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center is to inspire volunteer service through Catholic-based organizations. We support prospective volunteers during their exploration of service opportunities, strengthen the personal and spiritual development of volunteers while they serve, and assist former volunteers to stay connected to their ideals and their communities. 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 have a missionary heart.

The Pallotti Center is located in Washington, DC.

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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