



# Shared Visions

A publication for the spiritual formation of lay volunteers  
from The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center for Apostolic Development

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Spring, 1991

Volume One, Number One

## Congratulations

to you for your volunteer service! This puts you in a unique category of individuals. Volunteers are typically generous self-starters who are willing to risk and take the path less chosen. Because volunteers often work with limited resources, your creativity is typically high and you're resourceful in getting jobs done. So welcome aboard this first issue. This newsletter is produced specifically with you in mind. So your suggestions are most welcome. Write us with your ideas and recommendations for future issues.

This is a **shared** newsletter. It includes tasks to be completed in the privacy of your chateau. But we'll also encourage you to share your experiences, thoughts, feelings and dreams with co-workers, spiritual companions and friends.

When you share your dreams with others, something special happens. The dreams gradually become a shared vision ... sometimes one that changes the direction of your life. Your vision will grow and evolve. If you have not already done so, now, during your volunteer service, is an excellent time for developing your vision and laying your foundation for your life-long spiritual growth.

## Putting Your Dreams Into Words

Volunteers are often individuals with a personal dream. A private dream is a wonderful gift. Perhaps yours is to touch a life and make a difference, lift a child



from poverty, unshackle an adult from the chains of illiteracy, or give a teenager the confidence that he matters, that she is capable. Some volunteers are saying thanks to God for the gifts they've received, while others are stepping back, taking a breather and gaining perspective after years of school or work.

But a **vision**, as we use this term, is more than a dream. The dream begins as private, while a vision is shared and social. The dream can be lost or forgotten

while the vision gradually develops and becomes something for life. The vision has depth, as do roots. The vision has sustaining and uplifting strength, as do wings.

## Go Beyond Your Dream, And Develop Your Vision

In short, vision is the extension of the dream. The dream grows into a vision by being shared with others in particular ways. We do this by sharing our values: in word by thoughtful discussions; in feelings by making decisions and setting priorities; in actions by consistently embodying the vision.

These three levels of sharing, the **intellectual**, **emotional** and **physical**, constitute core areas, three building blocks by which we can shape who we're becoming. What we do with our mind, heart and actions guides how our personal dream becomes a vision in our community of co-workers and friends.

Building and sharing your spiritual foundation eventually will go beyond simply helping others, valuable as this assistance is. When this vision enlightens the way for ourselves and others, it's called **leadership**. By this fourth level of service, the volunteer solidifies his or her move beyond the self and

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**BEYOND YOUR DREAM**

*continued from page one*

into the lives of others. Finally, when our vision includes the light of faith and affirms our Lord's presence, in self and in others, it's called **prayer**. This listening for the voice of God is the force that holds each person's spirituality together and challenges ongoing growth.

**We Suggest Your Spiritual Foundation Include These Five Building Blocks**

These five areas are keys for each person's growth and spiritual formation: **intellectual, emotional, physical, leadership and prayer**. We'll encourage you, over time and in different ways, to attend to each area. It's a task for a lifetime.

If you've not already done so, one decision we hope you'll make during your volunteer service is to nurture your self, your dreams and vision, by periodically examining how you

**How balanced is your approach to spiritual development?**

Is there one of these five foundational areas you feel most strongly nurtures your spirituality? If yes, describe ways this happens.

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Is there one foundational area you feel most needs your attention? If yes, what are ways you could strengthen it?

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Using the see-saw as an image of (im)balance, draw your approach to spirituality, placing the 5 building blocks appropriately along the balance beam. Is it evenly balanced, slightly tipsy or quite unbalanced?

**Before you became a volunteer, when were some of the times you felt in touch with your own spirituality, or close to Christ?**

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**Now that you've served as a volunteer, what are some experiences that have strengthened your faith?**

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are doing in each of these five areas. By making this decision, you'll be laying a foundation for your spiritual formation which will last for the rest of your life.

Research suggests that the strength of the person comes through informed and considered decision-making, which is consistently acted upon. This is a common finding emerging out of some social-psychological and religious studies.

We'll help by providing you with some stories, exercises, volunteers' experiences and some challenging ideas. You can consider them in private and/or share them with a friend or spiritual companion. We especially encourage you to share these ideas with your group of co-workers and fellow volunteers.



## **Suggestions For Sharing Your Dreams / Vision With Others**

One way of working with this shared newsletter is to read through the introduction and work with the exercises that appeal to you. On this page, reflect on the questions, probe your thoughts and feelings about your motivations for doing volunteer service.

After having done this, meet with a mentor, the volunteer program director or friend. Share your answers and reflections with other persons.

An alternative approach is to meet in a group with your co-workers or friends. Elect a leader for this first session. Set up and agree upon ground rules, including that what is shared in the group, when specified as confidential, stays in the group. An atmosphere of mutual trust is important.

In this group setting, participants can share their reflections about the questions including their initial motivation for volunteering. If someone wants to take a "pass" or be brief, that's o.k.

A second approach to sharing in the group is to begin with the exercise on page four. Read the biblical parable of the sower and seed. Give each person a chance to share reflections on each of the questions posed.

A third approach is to have everyone before hand read through the one of the two volunteers' reflections on their experiences (on pages four or five). Ask: How do the volunteer's experiences compare with your own?

Close the meeting by inviting anyone so disposed to voice a prayer or pray briefly together about a mutual concern.

### **For Sharing with Friends / Co-Workers... Have Any Dreams Lately?**

Vision is formed when one's personal, internal ideals and hopes are brought face to face with external reality. Naturally, or with a bit of effort, this happens to every volunteer.

With this in mind, we encourage you to begin by privately considering some of the contours, the terrain of the dream(s) that initially led you to do volunteer service.

1. *What were some of your thoughts, your hopes and motivations which led you to volunteer?*

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2. *During your volunteer service to date, has your motivation changed? In what way?*

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3. *Is there one expectation you brought with you, something you assumed would happen during your volunteer experience, that has not happened? If so, describe it.*

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4. *To what extent has your dream been fulfilled so far?*

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### **FEATURE: Reflections From Volunteers**

**In the beginning . . .** Jesus gave us one central message, that the reign of God is at hand, calling us to convert and live with a sense of dependence on God.

**Creation was a rainbow . . .** and so there came to be adaptations to diverse cultures and specific needs. Historically, Jesus' message was colored by

four gospels and a parade of gifted disciples.

**Male and female he created them . . .** And there came to be a rich diversity of experiences and points of view.

In each issue, we hope to celebrate this diversity of perspectives by presenting reflections of volunteers.

### **SUGGESTIONS for using this feature . . .**

Read through the following two articles and ask:

*continued on page four*

**SUGGESTIONS**

*continued from page three*

1. How do my current experiences compare with those described by Sharon and Steve?

2. What do I find attractive or challenging about their experiences and reflections?

**The following paragraph was written by Ms. Sharon May, a volunteer and the former editor of the Marianist Voluntary Service Corps newsletter, *The Vine*.**

*When a new volunteer walks into an MVSC house for the first time it LOOKS like they are just carrying in their luggage with them. Wrong. They are also bringing in baggage (usually in the form of parents, siblings, heavy expectations, hidden heartaches, an assortment of faces, a hunger to be loved, a hope to be linked, a recent and highly inflammable argument, and a rich history worth listening to). The baggage is usually brought in after the luggage, during the night perhaps. No one knows for sure. All of a sudden, about a month into community life, everyone realizes that the house is really crowded and they start trying to get their parents to move out, or someone else's parents.*

**For Possible Discussion . . .**

Who's "at home" (in both senses in your volunteer community? Do you feel as though you have brought "visitors" in with you as part of your baggage? If yes, describe. In hindsight, knowing what you now know, would you do anything differently?

**The following reflection was written by Steve Milback who served as a volunteer with Franciscan Volunteer Ministry.**

**For Sharing with Friends / Co-Workers...**

Not everybody comes into volunteer service with clear, articulated ideas or specific ways we want to help others. Sometimes we stumble into it. Often our motives are mixed when we start out; almost imperceptively our values change if we are open.

**READ THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MATTHEW 13: 1-9).**

In this biblical story, the seed spread on the ground refers to the "good news." The types of ground reflect the different levels of the listeners' openness to the good news. When this scriptural parable is taken metaphorically, we can gain some added mileage. Discuss your volunteer experience in light of this parable.

1. **In general**, what are some of the types of motivation which you think would be like the rocky or good soils?

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2. Consider your various **personal** motivations for volunteering. Are there any types of motivation that seem like the rocky soil? If yes, in what sense? Were there any allowing you to get off to a fast start and volunteer enthusiastically, but then begin to wilt when the difficulties of the "heat of the day arrived?"

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3. Which of your motives do you feel are like the good soil, allowing your volunteer work to nurture you, helping your roots develop and grow?

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**PART I: Dynamics of Community Life**

*"So why did you do it?" I can't help but chuckle to myself when people pose this question to me. Immediately my mind flashes to another scene where I am on trial for having committed a violent crime and the prosecutor has posed the question in an effort to ascertain the truth.*

*When asked to write this article, I was informed that the main readership would consist of current volunteers. Naturally, I felt at ease having learned this, because I recall how much I thoroughly enjoyed being, sharing, and conversing with my housemates from last year and figured that this experience would provide me with the same*

*continued on page five*



## DYNAMICS

*continued from page four*

satisfaction (selfish, aren't I?).

As most of you have probably discovered, any given volunteer group may resemble a mini-United Nations. Each of us brings to the volunteer year our own notions of God, life, love, and relationships. These individual differences, for me, provided the charge or electricity that helped make the volunteer year such a life-giving experience.

Of course, all of us realize that we don't always see eye-to-eye with our fellow volunteers, but conflicts handled in the light of mature Christian love are usually rectified in a short period of time. And aren't we surprised when out of conflict, comes growth and perhaps a new closeness to a temporarily strained relationship.

Although it's been a bit of a whirlwind tour, I felt compelled to discuss my experience of volunteer group dynamics. I'm of the opinion that the lay Christian community is the essential foundation to any Christian volunteer experience.

## PART II: MINISTRY

In January of 1988, I made my first trip to the Kensington section of Philadelphia with a student group from Siena College. At the risk of offending native Philadelphians, this particular section of the city would never make it on a list of desirable places to live. Many of the buildings in the area are wrought with decay, bearing resemblance to a war zone.

Over the course of one week I lived and worked at St. Francis Inn Soup Kitchen; then promptly returned to the more familiar territory of a college campus.

During the course of my senior year at Siena, I started giving more serious consideration to the possibility of volunteering for a



year. Like most young people, I found myself asking questions such as: "What gives my life meaning?" "What am I called to do as a follower of Christ?" "How am I going to pay back all those student loans?"

Characteristic of my last years at Siena was a growing dissatisfaction with my lifestyle. Not that I would ever be asked to do a guest spot on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," but I felt that I could more fully utilize the talents which were generously given me. My feelings of disconnectedness left me few alternatives. And so it was, that I found myself in Philadelphia once again.

The people of Kensington re-awakened in me the passion of God's love. In the midst of sub-human living conditions, joblessness, and drug addiction I was continually amazed at the faith of these forgotten people. They were living examples of what it means to be a people of hope.

Through the weeks and months of my volunteer year my new-found friends taught me many lessons. They reminded me of the preciousness of every human life, even though we lived in an area where life was often quickly extinguished. Perhaps

most importantly, they reminded me that whatever tasks we undertake along life's journey, be they great or small, work at those tasks with a loving heart.

## For Possible Discussion . . .

What do you think Steve meant when he said: the lay Christian community is the essential foundation to any Christian volunteer experience?

## We Want To Hear From You

This publication is written for lay volunteers. So please let us know what in this first issue you find interesting, challenging, helpful or none of the above. We are interested in your telling us how you used this issue's exercises for personal reflection and group sharing. So write us with your recommendations for improving our next issue. If you would be willing to submit your own personal reflections on your experiences as a volunteer, we would like to read them. If there are particular questions or volunteer experiences you want to see explored, please tell us.

**The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center:**

to promote lay volunteer service that challenges the 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. Local Pallotti Centers are located in Boston, Memphis, Saint Louis and San Francisco. The National Office is in Washington, D.C.

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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**

**Spring, 1991**

**Vol. 1, No. 1**

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