

# SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 20, Number 1

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

## Getting Connected

Greetings from the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center! Whether you are a new or continuing volunteer, we hope that this year's four issues of *Shared Visions* will help you in your mission. *Shared Visions* is written by former volunteers for current volunteers.

Over the past year, the Pallotti Center staff led several discussions for volunteers returning from mission. One topic seemed to come up over and over again: connection. Returning missionaries told us that volunteering helped them re-discover the joys of simple human connection: meeting new and different people, enjoying long conversations uninterrupted by cell phones and Blackberries, working as a team on a job too large for one. Many felt more connected with God and themselves during their volunteer experience, and many wondered how to keep that connection in their everyday lives.

In today's world, it sometimes feels like we communicate more, but connect less. Thanks to amazing technologies like Facebook, Twitter, and Skype, we can meet new friends and stay in touch with old acquaintances through the years and around the globe. We at the Pallotti Center value all of these technologies; indeed, many of you may have found us through our website, Facebook fan page, Twitter feed, or blog. Yet, sometimes all of these means of communication can become overwhelming, distracting us with constant chatter and preventing us from taking the time to truly listen to God, ourselves, and each other.

Over the next four issues, we will explore the theme of connection. What does it mean to really connect with God, another human being, and yourself? What special opportunities for connection are part of the volunteer experience? When is it challenging to connect? If you are feeling disconnected from someone or something, how can you reconnect?

We hope that you will stay connected with us during your time as a volunteer and beyond! Please share your thoughts and suggestions with us at [sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org](mailto:sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org).

## Connecting at your Work Site

For many volunteers, the desire to connect with other people is a major motivation for pursuing long-term service. Long-term volunteers seek to live alongside the poor and oppressed, witnessing injustice and building relationships across divides. Many volunteers are also excited about the opportunity to live in volunteer communities, forming friendships with others who are committed to service. During your time as a volunteer, it is natural to make connections with your fellow volunteers and with the people you serve, but what about the permanent staff at your placement?



Some placements are staffed exclusively by volunteers and some volunteers work independently, but many are placed at sites with a mix of volunteers and paid, permanent staff. As a volunteer, you may find the paid staff at your placement intimidating. They may seem more experienced and knowledgeable, or too busy with their own projects to bond with a temporary volunteer.

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# ***Biblical Reflection: The Still Small Voice***

Communication is an essential part of any relationship, including our relationship with God. The earliest cultures had simple means of communicating their relationships with the Lord - offerings, prayers, Scripture, psalms. Not so different from our means of worship and prayer today.

But it is no secret that our culture also has many ways of communicating with one another that sometimes get in the way of our communication with God. For example, we spend hours on Facebook instead of time in prayer. We text message instead of calling a person we love. We use quick means of communicating to substitute two-way conversation. And our relationship with God relies on this type of long conversation.

This is not a new problem for humanity. It seems to be in our nature to get lines crossed when communicating with God and one another. In 1 Kings 19:11- 14, the prophet Elijah is waiting to communicate with God. He encounters all kinds of acts of God which seem like they could contain God's message, but he does not hear God in the earthquake or wind or fire. He hears Him in 'a tiny whispering sound' (1 Kings 19: 12).

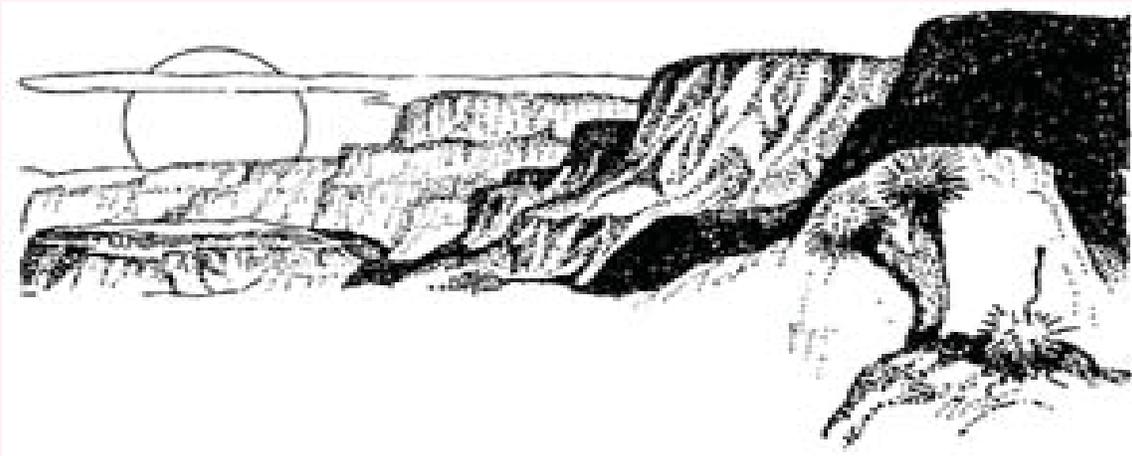
At this point in your volunteer experience, you may be eager to engage with many new experiences and people. This engagement is an essential part of the volunteer experience, but remember to also prioritize time alone with God. God is certainly present in community; this is one of the reasons we gather together for worship. But community cannot be the only place where we meet God. There must also be that personal encounter with Christ in which we communicate with Him by ourselves.

After the events of the Paschal Mystery, on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13- 35) two disciples are conversing with one another about God, and Christ even appears to them. He exchanges words with them, but it is not until he breaks the bread that they see that it is He ( Luke 24:35- " Then the two recounted... how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread").

As Catholics, we encounter Christ like a 'tiny whispering sound' in the Eucharist. He is in the community and words and actions around us, but as Catholics we believe He is intimately, quietly present to us in the Eucharist.

As you begin (or continue) your journey as a volunteer, you may naturally be able to be more in tune with God. If you are in a remote village or in a developing country, you may not be able to communicate through more modern means, but it does not mean that you will be immune to distraction from a focus on God.

Whether your experience of volunteering takes place in a large, urban city or a small remote town, take time out to hear God in the 'tiny whispering sound'. Find a place where you can be quiet and listen for Him. Seek God in the Eucharist by finding a place you can attend Mass, if you do not already share Mass as a community. Attend a faith sharing group and, like Elijah, wait in those moments for the Lord to "pass by" (1 Kings 19: 11).



# Technology Inventory

In our modern society, technology is a part of our daily lives; so much so, we may not realize how much media we consume or use daily.

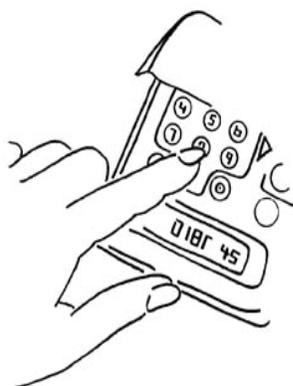
During your time as a volunteer, depending on your site, you may or may not have daily access to technology such as internet, computer or video game software, television, cell phones, etc.

Take a quick 'inventory' of what media or technology you use or have used in the past. Check off in each column what you used pre-volunteer experience and perhaps even how often you would use it. Now, what do you have access to currently? What - if anything - has changed?

	Pre-Volunteer	Current
Computer		
Internet		
Cell Phone		
Television		
DVD Player		
Ipod		
Other		

Individually or as a community, discuss your current relationship with modern media and technology. Have you experienced a change since you became a volunteer? If so, how does this change affect your volunteer experience? What are your feelings about this change? Is it positive, negative, or both?

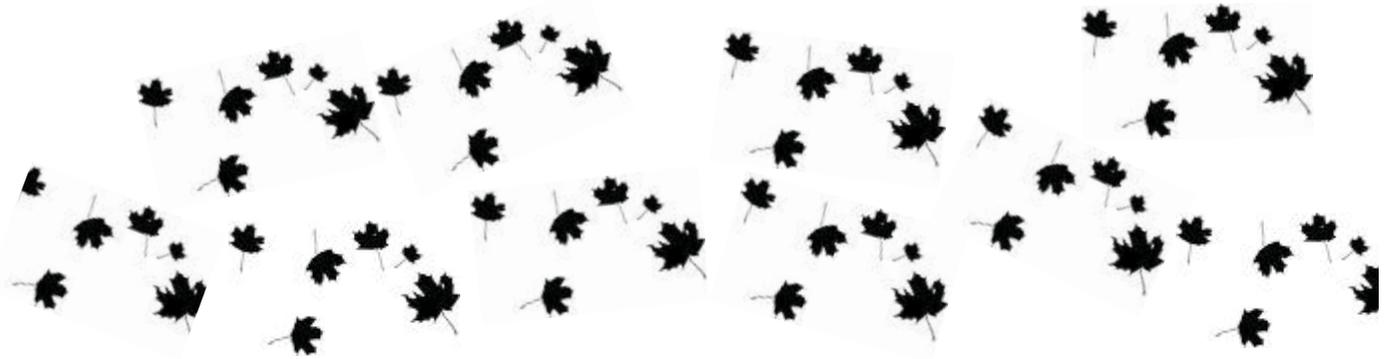
Modern technology can both help and hinder our communication and life experience. Think about the ways technology might be helpful to you and your community during this time. In what ways could it possibly hinder your experience?



Here are some other ideas that you may want to incorporate into your Technology Inventory:

- **Movie night** could be a way to bring community together. Try selecting a movie that could be used for discussion if you have television/DVD access. *Lights, Camera, Faith!* by Rose Pacatte from Pauline Media is a good resource with which to start.
- If you have internet access, **a blog** is a great way to let family and friends know what you are up to ( *and be sure to let us at the Pallotti Center know, too, so we can follow your journey!*)
- As a community or for yourself, choose to limit access to **cell phones and internet** gadgets. Give yourself a set time for their use and stick with that timeframe. While they are great resources to keep in touch with family and friends, they can hinder time with community and time for quiet prayer or reflection.

# God Spots: Finding God in the Present Moment



Up in the hills of West Virginia there is summer camp for Appalachian children run by a group of sisters and full-time volunteers. Committed to reinforcing the values of Appalachian culture and care for God's creation, the camp has a daily ritual for the 9-12 year olds which they affectionately call "**God spots**". Each child takes a small mat and ventures alone into a spot in the yard. In those spots they sit quietly for nearly ½ hour, taking **inventory of their senses**. Using their **sight**, they take note of *butterflies, ants, moss and rocks*. They **listen** to the *sound of the breeze and their own breathing*. They **touch** blades of grass and find the *texture* different on each side. They find **smells** (always a favorite among 11 year-old-boys) and begin to note how their sense of **taste** reacts to a smell even when they haven't put anything in their mouths. When the children reunite, they share what they have sensed. It might sound like an odd thing to ask of the age group, but by the end of the week of camp, it isn't uncommon to hear that the time in the 'God spot' was the favorite and most memorable activity of the week. In an effort to embrace a slowing down and appreciation of nature, the camp leaders are teaching the children to be in the **present moment**.

As a volunteer you may feel pulled in many directions. Those you serve, your community and your family and friends back at home can all demand time, concern and energy. With so many demands on us from many different sources, our lives can seem like a random array of disconnected priorities. *Even our prayer life can seem fragmented with unrelated petitions*. What we need is **connection with the God** who we know is alive in our lives. Without that connection our sense of *unity of purpose* can erode, leaving us scattered and unable to identify our response to God's call. *Our contact with God is only in the present moment*. But we can be so distracted that we miss God in this moment.

You don't need a mountaintop to find God's grace in this **present moment** at your volunteer home. Find a "**God spot**" in your neighborhood where you can *simply sit*. Depending on the place you are living, an ideal place might be a bus stop, a park or near a water source. If you're living in community, each member could go to different places at the same time. Quietly stay in that place for thirty minutes. *Take in your neighborhood*. Note particularly the **presence of God** in ways you might not otherwise observe.

What do you **see** frequently but might forget to look at?  
Is there anything you **hear** that you might usually dismiss?  
What textures can you **feel** right around you?  
Can you decipher the **smells** around you?  
Does the air you are breathing have a **taste**?

When you gather with your community, or to your own journal,  
discuss *what you have seen of God's graceful actions* that you had never noticed before.

# *Caritas in Veritate:* **A Papal Encyclical Calling for Personal Human Connection**

The latest papal encyclical has been recently published. It is available free of charge at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Called *Caritas in Veritate* (“Love in Truth”), the letter is seen by papal observers to be Benedict XVI’s response to the worldwide economic recession. A careful reading of the document reveals it to be an even more extensive treatise on authentic human development, as the Pontiff considers dozens of topics from the canon of Catholic social teaching. Consistent with the main emphasis of Catholic social thought from the beginning, Benedict makes it clear that the Roman Catholic Church values the dignity of the human person above all else. Achieving authentic connections – with other human beings and with God - is an important recurring theme of the letter.

**“One of the deepest forms of poverty a person  
can experience is isolation.”  
(paragraph 53)**

We might say to ourselves, “how can I possibly be isolated from others? I have 750 friends reading my status updates on Facebook and another 500 who follow every word I tweet on Twitter.” Benedict wisely observes a great irony in this modern state of affairs.

“Today humanity appears much more interactive than in the past: this shared sense of being close to one another must be transformed into true communion. *The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family* working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.”

(paragraph 53, emphasis in the original).

**“As society becomes ever more globalized,  
it makes us neighbours but does not make  
us brothers.”  
(paragraph 19)**

Along with a lack of interpersonal connectedness, there is also the problem of isolation from God. Today, some prefer to think that we are strangers going through the motions of life in a random universe. As Catholics, we affirm the contrary belief that we are children of a loving, immanent God who knows us in our earliest stages of development in our mother’s womb. Benedict writes of the complementary longings of forming relationships of true communion with other human beings and with God if people are to reach their fully developed potential. He urges us to look to the Trinity as the greatest example of such communion.

As you confront the challenges of human development in many different settings around the world this year, we invite you to spend some time alone or in community reading and reflecting on the wisdom contained within *Caritas in Veritate*. As you read, you might consider these questions and/or others you formulate as you relate the encyclical to your own experience:

**How do I personally measure human progress and development?  
How inclusive is the human family for me, and what is my role in it?  
Has technology brought me into closer communion with others or has it left me isolated?  
Do I expect my time as a volunteer to change any of these opinions?**

Yet, if you find the courage to reach out to the permanent staff at your placement, you can build relationships which benefit both of you. Perhaps you can learn something valuable from a staff person, who in turn can feel good about sharing knowledge with you. Perhaps your interest can help someone at your placement feel re-energized about his or her work. Your example might even inspire others at your placement to reach out to each other, building a closer and more collegial environment for everyone!

Unsure where to start? Try one of these three suggestions:

- 1) Set a personal goal to talk to one new person at your site every day until you have talked to everyone. You could ask a co-worker about his/her current projects, about his/her motivation for joining your organization, or even about the cute dog or kids whose pictures you walk by everyday. In striking up these conversations, be mindful of your co-workers' time. Don't approach someone who is obviously busy, and keep your initial conversation brief. Hopefully, you will lay the foundation for future conversations!
- 2) If you and your fellow volunteers normally eat lunch away from the regular staff at your organization, make it a point to eat in the staff lunchroom at least once each week. Or, if you prefer, invite one or more co-workers to join you at your favorite lunch spot.
- 3) If you live in a volunteer community, consider inviting staff from your organization to a house dinner or event.

## Shared Visions

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Authors and Editors: Alicia Brooks, Michael Goggin,  
Molly Linehan, Julia Strukely.

Production Editor: Molly Linehan

Advisors: Rev. Frank Donio, SAC, Rev. Bob Kinast,  
Bill Lowell, Sr. Anita Joseph Reeves, CSC.

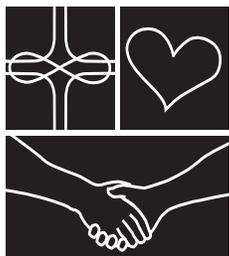
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### The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

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 Center takes its 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.



The St. Vincent Pallotti Center  
for Apostolic Development  
415 Michigan Ave. NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
(202) 529-3330 (in DC area)  
(877) VOL-LINK (outside DC area)  
[pallotti@pallotticenter.org](mailto:pallotti@pallotticenter.org)  
[www.pallotticenter.org](http://www.pallotticenter.org)

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