

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 21, Number 2

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

Living Ministry in Advent and Christmas

During Advent, we await our most quintessential expression of “living ministry”: celebration of the Incarnation: God taking human form with us on earth. This season is the ideal time to reflect on the ways in which we come to others as living, breathing ministers of the Gospel. In this issue of *Shared Visions*, we invite you to reflect on your own ministries as volunteers using the stories and characters of the Advent Gospel texts. We offer thoughts on the Advent idea of “waiting” and how it might relate to ministry. Finally, we offer some ideas for celebrating the season, both with fellow volunteers and at home. All of us at the Pallotti Center wish you a blessed Advent and hope that you begin the New Year refreshed and ready to continue your ministry!



Celebrating Christmas in Community

In August, the Pallotti Center welcomed a new Marketing and Recruitment Coordinator: Monica Thom. Monica was a Jesuit Volunteer in 2006-07. You may have met Monica at service fairs across the country this fall. Welcome Monica! In this reflection, Monica shares her story of celebrating Christmas with her volunteer community in New Orleans, LA.

Having spent every Christmas up to that point in my life in Michigan (sans the one year when I was about ten, and we packed up our Ford Aerostar Minivan and drove to visit my grandparents in Tampa), I was a little weary about finding out what happened South of the Border. By “South of the Border,” I, of course, mean south of the Michigan – Ohio state line. New Orleans knows how to throw a party and how to be festive. So I figured celebrating the Christmas season there would be an experience in and of itself.

To my liking, Christmas was Christmas even as far away as New Orleans. And in true New Orleanian style, there was flair. People still decorated trees, but instead of tinsel, they used Mardi Gras beads. In addition to decorating the bushes and shrubs in their yards, they also decorated the palm trees along Canal St. Even the streetcars were decorated with wreaths and garlands. The best part of it all (again, having spent the first 22 years of my life in the Great North), everyone did all this wearing shorts and t-shirts.

The culmination of the Christmas season for me with my community took place after Christmas. The seven of us had all gone back to our respective cities of origin to spend the holiday with our families, but when we came back, we all wished we could have celebrated together. So, we decided to throw our own makeshift Christmas. And we made it a themed event – An Epiphany Gathering: Come Dressed as Your Favorite Nativity Character.

Continued on page 6...

In this issue... Page 1: Celebrating Christmas in Community // Pages 2-3: Community Activity: Living the Advent Gospel // Page 4: Biblical Reflection: Living Ministry in Advent // Page 5: The Meaning is in the Waiting // Page 6: Celebrating Christmas in Community continued.

Community Activity: Living the Adve

Bringing anticipation to Advent can be key to finding the transformative meaning of the season. Use this activity to reflect on our ministry experience. As a community, use newsprint to make a large version of this activity for all members.

You will want to meet early each week to discuss the character and what that character means to you. Each member will share his or her response in the space provided. Leave room in each square for community members to write their reflections where it is accessible for reflection throughout the week. At the beginning and end of the week, bring the activity back to the community.

	<p>First Week of Advent: Matthew 24:37-44</p> <p>Noah A fallen world in need of Salvation</p> <p>What, in your ministry, reflects the world's need for salvation?</p>	<p>Second Week of Advent: Matthew 3:1-12</p> <p>Pharisees/Sadducees Hypocrisy and the need for repentance</p> <p>How does society fall short in delivering the message of Christ with those who you minister?</p>
<i>Community Member 1</i>		
<i>Community Member 2</i>		
<i>Community Member 3</i>		
<i>Community Member 4</i>		
<i>Community Member 5</i>		

Advent begins the new church year. In our Lectionary, Advent 2010 begins Year A. The lettered cycles for weekdays we begin Year II. There are only two cycles for weekday readings: Year I and Year II.

Understanding the lectionary can be a bit complicated. Traditionally, Catholics refer to *The Ordo** in order to find the readings for the year. However, today we have the US Catholic Bishops to help us online! Simply go to the Readings page (<http://www.usccb.org/nab/>) and choose the day you are looking for.

* *The Ordo* is published annually. Interested in finding one for yourself? St. John's Abbey sells the

Advent Gospel

Each week of Advent there is a character in the Gospels whom we can focus on from this table. Be sure to make as many rows as you have community members in your ministry.

Discuss each theme and have each community member contribute to add more thoughts as the week goes on. Display the table in your ministry. Bring this reflection to your community prayer.



1-12	Third Week of Advent: Matthew 11: 2-11	Fourth Week of Advent: Matthew 1:18-24
<p>John the Baptist Living counter-culturally to point the way to hope</p> <p>What is the counter-cultural vision you see for your ministry?</p>	<p>Joseph Humbly letting go of expectations to let God bring salvation</p> <p>What do you need to let go of in order to let God's grace flow through your ministry?</p>	

(A,B and C) reflect the Sunday readings. On the order to know which readings are used each day of the week, visit the website. Check out its website: <http://www.osb.org/ordo/>



Biblical Reflection: Living Ministry in Advent

During this Advent season, our lectionary tells us about the coming of Christ through the words of Matthew. Each of the Gospel readings for the four Sundays of Advent offers important lessons about what it means to live ministry. Alone or in community, take some time to ponder these readings, reflecting on what they have to teach you about your own ministry as a volunteer.

On the **First Sunday of Advent** (Matthew 24:37-44), we hear Jesus' warning that we must "stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." This text reminds us that Christ often comes at unexpected times and through unexpected messengers. If we are not looking for signs of Christ's work in our lives, we might miss them. Think back on your time as a volunteer so far: Have you seen signs of Christ in unexpected people or places? Have there been times when you have been so busy or focused on other things that you might have missed signs of Christ? Are there ways that you can help yourself and/or your fellow volunteers to "stay awake" to signs of Christ's work in the future?



On the **Second and Third Sundays of Advent** (Matthew 3:1-12 and 11:2-11), we hear about John the Baptist. John appears in the desert, proclaiming his message and admonishing a group of Pharisees and Sadducees. By speaking to this particular group, John is confronting the establishment, conveying their need for repentance, not just as individuals but as representatives of a culture that has been unjust. In the following week's reading, Jesus describes John's counter-cultural lifestyle and declares that "there has been none greater than John the Baptist." In what ways have you contributed to "social sin" – that is, injustice committed by the society in which you participate? How have you benefited from "social sin?" For what do you need to ask repentance? In what ways do you live counter-culturally in order to confront society's injustice?

Finally, on the **Fourth Sunday of Advent** (Matthew 1:18-24), we learn about Joseph's role in the birth of Jesus. When Joseph realizes that his betrothed, Mary, is pregnant, he acts with both righteousness and compassion by seeking to end the engagement quietly. Then, when the angel appears and tells him that Mary has conceived by the Holy Spirit, Joseph takes a huge leap of faith by accepting Mary as his wife and claiming Jesus as his son. Throughout the text, Joseph embodies both obedience and humility, two important aspects of any ministry. How, as a volunteer, have you practiced obedience and/or humility? When have you seen these virtues embodied by others? How can you and/or your volunteer community seek to practice obedience and humility in the future?



The Meaning is in the Waiting

Some of us used to think that waiting was for people who didn't get things done. Go-getters don't wait. If we want to defend the dignity of life, work for justice and build the Kingdom of God, we needed to get out there and do it.

Can you relate?

Sure, we understand the abstract concepts of Advent: Mary waiting to deliver the Christ child. Each of us taking a moment from the busy holidays to consider the "Reason for the Season." We know that Advent pulls us to a deeper place than indoor trees and cookies for reindeer.

But waiting?
Does that actually fit into the reality...
of our season...
of our lives...
of our faith?

Our individual commitments to service and ministry vary greatly. Yet, there is little doubt that our ministries put each of us into contact with those who wait. They may wait for a biopsy, for a green card, for a baby's birth, for a release date, for Social Security or for religious freedom. These are things we cannot hurry. We too, wait. By their side, we invest our time and our compassion.

It could seem as if our service is simply biding time until something "real" happens. This is a deceptive impression.

Our service, indeed our ministry, is in the waiting. When we set our hearts to the present reality of others, we share their burden, giving them - and ourselves - the freedom to live in the moment. In doing so, we give life to those we live alongside. Our ministry is not passing time for the profound moment. The profound moment is in our ministry with those who wait.

Our faith is rooted in living life while waiting...
for justice and liberation...
for the return of Christ...
for the Kingdom of God.

We each wait in our own ways. A book that might help guide accompaniment and waiting is Fred Cloud's *Waiting: A Time to Hear God's Voice* (Upper Room Publishing). The book is filled with prayers from occasions of waiting: from car repair to an end to capital punishment, and tulips to bloom to the end of my earthly life. Cloud patiently reminds us that waiting is central in the Christian spiritual life.

It was more than just a gathering of the seven of us and our friends. In addition to celebrating the start of Mardi Gras season (which officially begins on the Epiphany), it was a way for us to bring out our unique personalities and Christmas traditions together. We carried on the celebrations we had at our individual homes and came together to celebrate Christmas, to celebrate the city we were so fortunate to serve for a year, and to celebrate each other – recommitting, in a way, to being each other's family for the rest of the year. The time after Christmas was an opportunity for us to grow from the challenges we had faced in the first half of the year and to develop the strong relationships that would help guide us through the remainder of our time in New Orleans.

In that spirit, bring your community with you wherever you celebrate the holidays this year. If you are heading back home, share stories and pictures of your year so far – talk about those people in your life – your community, your clients, your co-workers, your neighbors. It might be hard for family and friends to understand what you are doing this year, but it is easy for people to connect with stories and faces. If you are staying in your city, be sure to find people with whom to share the experience. Volunteering at a local soup kitchen or spending the holidays with a co-worker or local friend are ways to connect with a new place and opportunities to build relationships with new friends and neighbors.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing this holiday season, be sure to take some time to celebrate the community you have become a part of this year. Share those experiences with the people you celebrate with, and take back the experiences of the holidays to your community.

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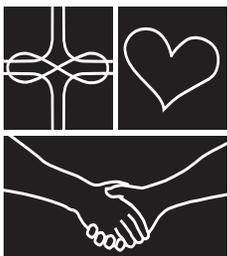
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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

Our goal is to promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church, and to support lay volunteers before, during, and after their term of service. 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 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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