



# Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers  
presented by The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

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Volume Two, Number One

## Shared Visions' Goals

Our first issue of Shared Visions presented you with five "building blocks" you may use in order to develop your spirituality. They are: intellectual growth, emotional health, physical health, leadership and prayer. Our aim is to touch on at least one of these dimensions of spiritual growth in each newsletter.

The exercises provided in Shared Visions are there to assist in your spiritual development. Volunteers who live in community with other volunteers may benefit from group reflection and shared prayer as a way of getting to know their companions at a different level. Not to say that you need only share with your community, you may want to incorporate the materials provided by Shared Visions in your workplace, your church, or in your family.

Shared Visions is a tool. It is to be used any way you see fit. Shared Visions will provide you with stories, exercises, volunteer experiences and some challenging ideas. You choose how you will use them, either with a group or on your own. It's up to you.

## How to Use the Shared Visions Worksheet

The tear off sheet of your Shared Visions newsletter is a worksheet for you to use in group discussions, in private meditation or to share with a friend.

Perhaps you may want to save your worksheets as a type of spiritual journal.

### Inside this issue . . .

- \* An invitation for you to participate in Shared Visions
- \* Former volunteers examine aspects of community living
- \* Male and Female: How do they communicate?
- \* Worksheet exercises and discussion questions

## Shared Visions is . . .

Shared Visions is your newsletter. Shared Visions will be published four times a year in order to assist you in your spiritual development and growth.

## "Your experiences may be shared by others . . ."

Since Shared Visions is your newsletter, we need your input to help put it together. Please send us your thoughts on any Shared Visions issues you've seen. Send us your reflections, meditations, prayers, photos (which we will be sure and return to you) or anything you feel expresses your spiritual growth as a lay volunteer. Also consider sending us a letter about your contact with and solutions to tough situations you've come across in your ministry. Your experiences may be shared by others and your solutions may assist a fellow lay volunteer.

## FEATURE

### VOLUNTEER REFLECTION:

The following article was written by Leah Sealey, a former JIV (Jesuit International Volunteer), who is now a staff member of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center.

### UNDERGOING THE "TRIALS" OF LAY MINISTRY

When I was accepted to a lay ministry program I felt a sense of importance, anticipation and

invincibility. I felt proud to have been chosen to serve and, although unsure of the road ahead, I was confident that I would be able to "move mountains" in order to fulfill God's will and further His Kingdom.

Those positive feelings helped me reinforce my decision to take time out from the regular work force and from other obligations in order to live out my Christian faith through service with the poor.

## "This is not what I expected!"

It wasn't until I had unpacked all my belongings, had time to get to know other members of my community and workplace, acclimated to my new surroundings and finally had begun the actual work of my new ministry that it occurred to me: "This is not what I expected!"

"My room is drafty with paper thin walls."

"One member of my community has an annoying habit of always bringing the conversation back to her own experience."

"It really is uncomfortably muggy in this part of the globe!"

"The people I work with spend the whole day complaining."

"I feel unable to please anyone - especially myself."

I found it important to have a formula to follow in order to alleviate some of my feelings of frustration as a lay minister. In my experience I tried to actively DO something about my feelings. I found that prayer and reflection could be a useful tool but unfortunately, in times of difficulty (when I was in most need of it), I often failed to utilize it.

To demonstrate this formula

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consider the following: for a volunteer who has just encountered the reality (or the "Post Romantic" Stage) of lay ministry, Acts 14:22 may provide some comfort. It is a passage pertaining to the encouragement given to the disciples as they began their initial ministries of bringing Jesus' message of Good News to others.

"They gave their disciples reassurances and encouraged them to persevere in the faith with this instruction: 'We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God.'"

Reflections are not always taken from the Bible. They can stem from articles, conversations, workshops, retreats or basically anything that causes you to look at things differently. The second step and perhaps most important is prayer. Prayer offered me a chance to free myself of the burden I carried.

Through your prayer and reflection you may resolve to seek or contact a spiritual director or to confide in a veteran volunteer in your program, keeping in mind to focus the topic on your personal struggle and not on other people.

Through your prayer and reflection you may come to understand and accept your challenges.

Through your prayer and reflection you may come to realize the need to confront a person you live or work with.

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### **“. . . many of life's 'trials' involve personal growth and self actualization . . . ”**

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Through your prayer and reflection you may find the need to confront your own behavior and beliefs. (Be mindful that the "trials" referred to in Acts aren't always related to the perceived struggle others put you through, rather, many of life's "trials" involve personal growth and self actualization.)

Prayer and reflection help us approach and understand the "trials" we experience as disciples of Jesus.

Even since I completed my volunteer experience I find that when my ministry and relationships are

going well, it is easy for me to offer them up as prayer. Why is it then when I am struggling, do I not also see this as prayer?

Through difficult times I need to recall that my "trials" allow me to grow, granting me the opportunity to reaffirm or readjust my current stance on issues and beliefs.

I now understand that my "trials" should be offered up as prayer just as easily as my successes.

The idealistic attitude I had toward my ministry changed with my first confrontation as a volunteer. I had rough days! It took me a while to understand that this too was part of God's plan for me.

In my life, prayer and reflection have allowed me the opportunity to thank God for making me a person with feelings - all kinds of feelings - that I need in order to further my own Christian growth and the coming of His Kingdom. †

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### **FEATURE VOLUNTEER REFLECTION:**

*The following story was written by David Seleme, a former Jesuit Volunteer.*

When I entered the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC), I came in with the highest possible ideals and pie-in-the-sky goals as to the work I was setting out to do. I came with what I thought were concrete, well-defined notions of what community was, what volunteer work ought to be, what peace and justice ought to be, and what the role of the Church was in bringing about peace and justice. I thought of myself as a tolerant, broad-minded, reasonably well-adjusted individual. I overflowed with good intentions. I genuinely cared about the poor and was moved by a very genuine desire to understand the causes of injustice and poverty in the world. I had a well-developed world view and thought in terms of good versus evil and saw myself as firmly planted on the side of good. There may have been a touch of a messianic complex in there somewhere.

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### **"Communications between my self and my community . . . were often difficult."**

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But within a few months of my entering JVC, I found myself feeling increasingly disillusioned about my community at home and at my workplace. Community was a lot of hard work. I felt unfocused, my role as a volunteer seemed vague and undefined. Communications between myself and my community and myself and my workplace were often difficult.

I realize now that the period from the second month of my volunteer year to the end, was a crucial turning point in my life. It was then that my secure world-view, which included the very values of peace and justice which brought me to volunteer work in the first place, was challenged as never before. If despite my good intentions, peace and community were so allusive and difficult to achieve in the microcosm of my community, how could I possibly hope to change even a tiny corner of the macrocosm of the outside world?

As I look back with characteristically perfect hindsight on my year, I realize that as difficult to articulate or buried as some of my expectations, desires and needs were, they were nonetheless truly important motivating forces in my choosing volunteer work. To paraphrase an earlier article by Sharon May in the Spring edition of Shared Visions, I came into my work with a desire to love and be loved, with memories of failed past relationships, with habits, attitudes and prejudices, with unresolved conflicts with family members, and deeply ingrained methods of interaction with those family members. In short, I came to my year's work with all the baggage that is part and parcel of being human!

After a short "honeymoon" period of a couple of months, I found my expectations of my community and of my work bumping painfully against two hard realities. The first was that everyone's expectations of what constitutes a community

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experience were different. Second was that no two people in my community were at exactly the same stage, place, or level of spirituality.

**“The wonder here is not that conflicts arise but . . . [that] communities occur at all!”**

Think of it -- volunteers come from very diverse backgrounds. They bring with them their educations, their ethnicity, their life experiences, the unresolved and inarticulated needs and desires that I mentioned above. Perhaps a community member may be religious in a very traditional sense, while another may wish to express his or her faith in terms of social justice work. Perhaps a community member knows how to “push your buttons” in ways that remind you of a family member. Oftentimes, the deeper source of conflict between members in a community goes completely unrecognized. Thus, the

potential for deep-seated and divisive conflict exists in all communities. The wonder here is not that conflicts arise but that in spite of all of the baggage that we bring with us, communities can occur at all!

Here are some of my very general thoughts on community culled from my sage experience:

Try to work to keep lines of communication open.

Work on getting in touch with those unspoken, difficult-to-articulate expectations. Community meetings, discussions with friends or a spiritual director may help.

Remember that people *are* capable of change. People aren't static but are in a constant state of evolution in their beliefs, attitudes, and on their spiritual journeys. Change, real change, in individuals and communities is always possible. Don't give up. I have seen communities go through very positive changes in short time periods.

**“Each community is unique with a special blend of personalities . . .”**

Finally, don't compare yourself to other communities with which you might become acquainted. Each community is unique, with a special blend of personalities and gifts. As the ingredients of each community differ, so the final outcome will differ also.

My world view has remained intact but predictably has undergone modifications. For example, brushing off people who hold different opinions from mine is no longer as easy as it used to be. Not that I back down in my views one bit but I work harder at understanding where people are coming from emotionally and from there it's easier to find common ground on which to work. Community is, I have come to believe, more of a process than an end result. A process anchored in acceptance and commitment to one another. †

## **Dynamics of Conversation: Male and Female**

*Conversations can help us understand the dynamics of how we are getting along with others with whom we work and live. Here are two exercises that may open things up. Do you notice a male/female pattern?*

### **Exercise 1: What's your language?**

*When you have conversations, on a scale of 1 - 10 which of the following values do you feel tend to guide your approach?*

increasing my closeness to others 10 ————— 5 ————— 1 safeguarding my personal independence

striving for mutual agreement with others 10 ————— 5 ————— 1 gaining the upper hand over others

bringing people together 10 ————— 5 ————— 1 keeping others at a distance

### **Exercise 2: Which of the following comes closest to your view of the purpose of speech:**

- a) *the overall purpose is reconciliation; we raise ideas, maybe even argue a little, but ultimately we remove walls, the misunderstandings that separate individuals from one another;*
- b) *we live in a hierarchical social order; speech helps us be either one up or one down, so we need to protect ourselves from being pushed around;*
- c) *each person is part of a network of personal interconnections; speech helps us grow closer together, so we need to use it to gain and give affirmation.*

## Shared Visions Worksheet

The Reflections of David Seleme and Leah Sealey in this edition of Shared Visions focuses attention on the difficult and oftentimes emotional issues pertaining to the development of community.

Discuss the following ideas with your community, family, friends, people from your workplace or simply reflect or write about them on your own.

1. Volunteers are often asked to work in jobs that are new to them. This newness often triggers stress. Discuss or think about ways in which you handle stress, frustration or anger. As a lay minister, what are some of the struggles you had never encountered before?

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2. How did you handle the stress in those situations?

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3. What are some ways you've seen others deal with their struggles?

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4. What are some ways you see "prayer and reflection" as a useful tool in your life as a lay minister/person?

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5. In your volunteer experiences of living/working with people, how is your spirituality nurtured or challenged?

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6. What are some passages from the Bible or other readings which tell about the importance of community in the early church (eg., 1Cor. 3:1-8; 1Cor. 12:12-13:13; Acts 2:43-47, Acts 6:1-7;). Do you feel that community is an important aspect of our union with Christ even today?

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7. David Seleme mentions the importance of keeping the “lines of communication open” with members of your community. How can you achieve this in your community, in your family or in your workplace? (This may be a chance to set up some communication guidelines to follow in your community.)

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8. In A Thomas Merton Reader, Merton describes accepting his vocation and life as a gift. “You give some of it to others, if you can. Yet one should be able to share things with others without bothering too much about how they like it, either, or how they accept it.” He concludes if a person accepts your gift, they must need it and if they don’t “why should they?” “That is their business. Let me accept what is mine and give them all their share, and go my way.” (Source, A Thomas Merton Reader, “First and Last Thoughts: An Author’s Preface”) How much positive feedback do you need to be affirmed in your ministry? To what extent do you feel you are getting the affirmation you need?

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### ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### COPING WITH STRESS -- HOW DO YOU HANDLE IT?

Three approaches commonly surface in studies of how people react to stressful situations. Which of these, if any, describes your approach?

When in a stressful situation, I tend to do the following:

- a) Talk about it with close friends and learn from their points of view;
- b) Step back, analyze what is going on and think about possible solutions;
- c) Withdraw and fatalistically believe I am unable to change the situation;
- d) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you see as some of the positive and negative consequences of each approach?

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#### HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THE CHURCH?

Perhaps you see yourself as a “church-goer” or “helper” in the Church. But to what extent do you see yourself “as Church.” How could each of these perceptions influence the way volunteers relate to their ministry and relate to those with whom they work and live?

There are interesting connections between communication, conversation and community. Conversation can give birth to various levels of interpersonal communion and eventually to a community of like-minded friends. It can also go the other way.

It's out of our hearts and our values, that our speech flows. Volunteers bring their values to their workplace and living space and there find others' values. By discerning and evaluating how we tend to approach conversations, and our underlying values, we can better promote life's joys and reduce unnecessary stresses.

Sometimes our struggles are gender based. Current research on conversational styles found there are genuine gender differences. Ways of talking seem to differ between many (not all) men and women. Share your answers with a friend or other volunteers with whom you work or live.

For further information, the following publications may be helpful:

M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987, page 257 ff. (with regard to conversation as reconciliation);

Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, NY: Ballantine Books, 1991, (with regard to differences in ways men and women tend to approach conversation).

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, 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.



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