

staying connected

a publication designed for alumni of Catholic full-time volunteer programs
brought to you by the St. Vincent Pallotti Centers

Volume 2, Number 2

Spring 2000

Staying Connected... on your Spiritual Journey

For many former volunteers, the call to service was part of a spiritual yearning, a desire to grow closer to God. No longer a full-time volunteer, what does spirituality mean for you now? How would you describe your post-volunteer spirituality? In the circles to the right, do any of the words spark ideas of what it means to live a spiritual life?

In their book, *Sacred Circles*, Robin Deen Carnes and Sally Craig define spirituality as, "The practice of staying consciously connected with what makes us alive, with our own selves, with one another, and with the Great Other. Another aspect of spirituality is the part of us that strives to make existence meaningful."

Jungian therapist Jeremiah Abrams defines spirituality as a "holy longing, a yearning to know the meaning of our lives, to have a connection with the transpersonal." In the book, *Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, John Shea shares, "The spiritual life is, at root, a matter of seeing... spirit suffuses everything; and so the spiritual life is simply life, wherever and whenever, seen from the vantage point of spirit."

How do you seek to stay consciously connected with what makes you alive, with yourself, with one another and the Great Other? How do you strive to make existence more meaningful? Are there ways in which you have a holy longing to see all life from the vantage point of spirit?

Prayer: Responding to God's Invitation

By John Sealey, Jesuit Volunteer Corps: International, Belize '89-'91

In the last twelve hours, I have recorded two sayings in my book of quotes. Both resonate with my experience of being a former volunteer trying to maintain a meaningful prayer life. Good quotes, like good stories, ask us to make meaning. They question answers rather than answer questions. And they are user-friendly, an eminently important quality for former volunteer prayer life.

The only reason that we are sometimes disappointed with God's response to our prayer is that we are so often unclear with what we really want.

—James Shea, SJ

Frequently, I have only the most vague contours of my future direction - whether it is career, education, where to live or how to live. I haplessly daydream about some yet-to-be perfect balance of all these entities and then I wonder why God is not making this happen for me. This has a hobbling effect as it prevents me from living fully in the present, something my three-year old teaches me how to do all the time. She is completely absorbed in the present - whether dancing, playing, or listening to a story. Regrettably she will soon enough be schooled to lose this skill. Ironically, monastic life, especially in the Buddhist tradition, tries to regain that consciousness — to have a presence and availability to the moment.

We struggle to become free, precisely because we know that we are not free.

—Paulo Friere

Freire has many quote-ables — this one reminds me of St. Ignatius. It seems to paraphrase one of the core insights from the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. All things are created for one purpose, which

is to help us to move into loving relationships with God and others. Insofar as created things help us to this end, fine; but often attachments become *dis*-ordered. Ignatius recognized that desire is a strong motivation in human life. Our truest desire moves us to respond affirmatively to God's invitation to freedom, love and service. In this sense, desire is a healthy and positive dimension of humanity.

However, desire is a quantifiable emotion which can be "used up," sometimes after more selfish pursuits. This is when making a retreat, having a spiritual director or having spiritual companions can help us keep our desire for freedom and for loving relationships properly focused. These spiritual "tools" provide structure for reflection, self-examination and praying over scripture and over the scripture of our lives.

In contrast, much in today's society invites little self-investment or reflection. A case in point is the e-mail message which promises to help relieve hunger if we double click on a certain web page. This cyber-charity reveals much about our age, as it asks no sacrifice from me, no discomfort, and no analysis of why things are structured so that some starve. Does such double-clicking salve me with a false comfort when in fact I should feel discomfort? I do not know. But real work for justice, like friendship and even prayer itself, is not so easy. I have found that nurturing faith requires a persistence. The analogy of human friendship is helpful. I make time for my friend, inviting and responding to invitations to enter into each other's worlds. I also make sacrifices for a friend. Likewise, persistence in prayer can be a challenge, especially when I do not have the structures and expectations of my volunteer program to prod me.

In summary, these three modest proposals for prayer have been helpful for me as a former volunteer: 1. the *grace of clarity* to identify what I truly seek; 2. *discernment* that I might understand those areas of my life where I am not free; 3. *desire and commitment* to persevere in prayer.

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Staying Connected:
Assisting in the
continued formation of
former lay volunteers

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The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

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**St. Vincent
Pallotti Center
for Apostolic
Development**

Mission: To promote lay volunteer service that challenges 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 in Boston, Paterson, NJ, St. Louis and Sacramento. 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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♪ ♪ Spiritual Notes . . . For Life ♪ ♪

Have you ever heard an idea which struck a strong chord inside you? Ever been asked a question so rich that you felt you could profitably and prayerfully mull it over far into the future? Below are four such ideas, among the many found within the Christian tradition. We hope they are music to your ears and become themes for your spiritual journey.



St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), although a brilliant and impulsive young adult, later settled down and wrote in his Confessions: "You have made us for Yourself and *our hearts are restless* until they rest in You." He believed the Creator made humanity with a built-in and deep hunger for union with divinity.

- When I'm quiet and reflective, what hungers do I feel stirring in my heart?
- To what extent are these hungers calling me to go beyond myself, to unity with Christ? With others?



Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a vivacious 12th century "renaissance woman," a skilled physician, artist, musician, composer and abbess of a monastery. She taught that all aspects of human endeavor were appropriate avenues to God. Today her music is enjoying a widespread revival.

- Which of my daily activities do I find most fulfilling? Which give me a sense of rebirth?
- Which activities are the pathways by which I encounter God?



Carl Jung (1875-1961), the renowned 20th century psychologist and spiritual writer, wrote extensively about recognizing patterns in dreams, myths and religious symbols. He defined religion as "fidelity to your experiences," i.e., believing in, honoring and valuing your genuine feelings, which can be signs pointing to our connection with God and humanity.

- When do I give myself time to sit with my innermost experiences and to evaluate my degree of honesty with myself? With God?
- What might be some patterns in the way I view my relationship with God?



Teilhard deChardin (1881-1955), the priest archeologist who discovered the bones of Paleolithic Man in China, united faith in the God of love with faith in humanity's progress. He was convinced that humanity was slowly bonding and, together, converging toward Christ, the Omega point and destiny of all creation.

- What are my thoughts on my own ultimate purpose and destiny?
- In what ways do I see myself contributing to building bonds among people? With God?



THE PAGES & THE LINKS ~ references for open minds ~



Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality by Anthony De Mello, a masterful book of the spirit, challenging us to wake up in all aspects of our lives.

Sacred Circles: A Guide to Creating Your Own Women's Spirituality Group by Robin D. Carnes & Sally Craig. Also includes a variety of great spiritual resources.

Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life by Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat, contains a creatively organized collection of inspirational quotes and excerpts.

Swimming in the Sun: Discovering the Lord's Prayer with Francis of Assisi and Thomas Merton by Albert Haase. Winner of the 1994 Catholic Book Award, this treasure takes an intimate look at Jesus' prayer to Abba from personal, psychological and theological perspectives.

Tying Rocks to Clouds: Meetings and Conversations with Wise and Spiritual People by William Elliot, records one spiritual-seeker's soulful discussions with over twenty of the world's most renowned luminaries.

Looking for an extremely rich spirituality website? Then, check out www.spiritualityhealth.com for a wide variety of contemporary spirituality resources including current book and movie reviews, news, ideas and advice on spiritual practices.

Visit www.SEEscapes.com for a sightseers guide to spiritual insight. Great Catholic links, too!

For resources on prayer styles and literature click your way to www.diosaginanw.cncost.com/prayer

Looking to explore the frontiers of Christian spirituality? Try journeying to www.innerexplorations.com

www.feist.com/~philisa/index.html provides ecumenical encouragement and support for your Christian spiritual journey. Don't miss the Shalom Place and Daily Spiritual Seed links!

Guess What! We didn't even come close to listing a fraction of the wonderful spiritual books and authors out there. Other recommended authors include: Joyce Rupp, Thomas Moore, M. Scott Peck, Joan Chittister, Richard Foster, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Annie Dillard and Richard Rohr. Journey on!

~Living a Prayerful Life~

Building Intimacy with God

If spirituality includes building an intimate relationship with God, then prayer can help us to do this. To be in relationship with God can mean many things: to see, to know, to love, and to be sensitive to the uniqueness and beauty of every living thing. Trying to get along without prayer would be like having a special relationship with someone and not talking to, comforting or spending time with that person.

Staying committed to a prayerful life isn't always easy, especially during the hectic, transitional years following volunteer service. At times we may feel that something is missing in our lives. Perhaps we are designed to feel empty without intimacy with God. The Christian tradition has given us a rich spectrum of ways of praying and building that intimacy. Here is a sampling of six approaches. Which are unexplored avenues for you?

Try some of the methods below!

Meditative Prayer~ There are many different types of meditative prayer. **Centering prayer** is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer. During this prayer we consent to God's presence and action within. As a fruit of this prayer, at other times, our attention moves more readily outward to discover God's presence everywhere. To learn about centering prayer, including a description of its method, visit www.centeringprayer.com



Scripture~ Try reading a favorite story from the Bible. Read it a second time more carefully, trying to imagine what the people and setting look like. Now, try a prayer called **Composition of Place**. Imagine yourself being present in the story you read. Imagine yourself listening, watching and being present with Jesus. Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. Close your eyes and sit with these images.



Liturgical Worship~ The mass is often called the highest form of prayer. In the **Liturgy of the Word**, we reflect on God's voice, speaking through the readings. By participating in the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, we celebrate the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, the victory of life over death. The **Eucharistic Prayer** reminds us to die to self and rise to God's call. In **liturgical services**, we pray as we sing and celebrate Christ's presence as community.



Creativity~ Listening to music is prayerful; it can be a powerful tool for tapping into spiritual themes such as darkness/light, death/resurrection, and love, in a way we can understand and to which we can relate. We participate in the Creation Process in **song, dance and art** when we focus on the expression of the Spirit from within us. Creative prayer can help us exist in the present, where we can truly experience God.



Group Prayer~ Intimacy with God can be found through intimacy with our fellow believers! "Wherever two or more are gathered, I am present." Sharing personal journeys opens hearts and minds, and helps us to see ourselves and others more clearly, closer to how God sees us. Try starting a small prayer or bible study group.



Everyday Prayer~ **Living intentionally** is a form of prayer. In unceasing prayer, we make our everyday actions and thoughts into prayers, themselves. Appreciate the sacredness of the ordinary. Praise God in the creation that's all around you. Be aware of and help bring about the Reign of God among us!



FORMER VOLUNTEER SIGHTINGS IN... the Houston & San Antonio, TX areas



For this issue, we asked former volunteers in the Houston and San Antonio, TX areas about what's going on there for formers & to give us ideas to share!

Monthly former volunteer gatherings:

Houston has a large number of former volunteers who get together informally quite often. If you're looking to get connected with some former volunteers, give James or Tracy a call at 713-756-5095.

Some parishes where "formers" attend:

- Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Antonio). 1320 El Paso St. 210-226-4064 or 210-226-0731 (Social Service Department).
- San Fernando Cathedral (San Antonio). 115 Main Plaza. 210-227-1297.
- University of the Incarnate Word Chapel (San Antonio). Call Campus Ministry for details, 210-829-3138.
- St. Joseph's Parish (Houston). 1900 Kane St. Check out the 12:30pm Mariachi mass on Sundays. 713-222-6193.
- St. Francis of Assisi Parish (Houston). 5102 Dabney St. Very supportive of current & former volunteers. Great gospel choir and inspiring pastor. 713-672-7773.
- St. Mary of the Purification Parish (Houston). 3006 Rosedale. Strong African-American community. Try the 11am mass. 713-528-0571.
- St. Anne's (Houston). 2140 Westheimer. Check out the 7pm Sunday mass, a multi-cultural community. Large young adult ministry. 713-526-3276.

Retreat opportunities:

- Christian Renewal Center in Dickinson, TX. 281-337-1312.
- The Cenacle Retreat Center at Kirkwood & I-10. 281-497-3131.
- Annual FJV retreat each fall. Contact Craig Cashio, 713-756-5095.
- Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, 210-349-4173.

Peace and Justice organizations in the area:

- St. Joseph's Parish Social Justice Committee. 713-222-6193.
- TX Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Call Dave, 713-529-3826.
- First Friday Forum - meets monthly to discuss a different social justice issue at the Maryknoll house, 2360 Rice Blvd. 713-529-1912.
- Contact the Houston Peace News, 713-520-6048, for a monthly calendar of peace and justice events. Ask for Scott Askew.
- Pax Christi in San Antonio. Call Tom Keene at 210-826-6656.
- Independent Allies in San Antonio. Email Keith Lyons, ekliiii@texas.net

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Benedictine Resource Ctr. (San Antonio). Call Sr. Susan Mika, 210-735-4988.
- San Antonio Metro Ministries runs soup kitchens & shelters, 210-220-1240.
- Habitat for Humanity in San Antonio, 210-223-5203.
- Inner City Development. Call Ron or Patty Radle at 210-224-2199.
- The Catholic Worker House in San Antonio, 210-224-2932.
- Houston Catholic Worker (Casa Juan Diego), 713-869-7376.

Other valuable resources:

- For info. on young adult and prayer groups, contact Mary at the Archdiocese of San Antonio's World Missions Office, 210-734-2620.
- The ReBarn Center for Spirituality offers exhibits and classes in art, creative writing and other areas with a spiritual theme. 210-828-2224.
- Oblate School of Theology's outstanding theological library, 210-341-1366.
- La Tuna ice house (San Antonio) - great social spot for formers at 100 Proband St.

Who to contact for more information on

Houston and San Antonio Area gatherings:

For more information about any of these places and other connections to formers in the San Antonio or Houston areas, contact Tracy at 713-756-5095 (Houston), Mike Hess at 210-820-0393 or Catherine Archer at 210-736-3938 (both San Antonio).

Next Issue: Former Volunteer Sightings in... the New York City area

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Ways Leadership Can Be a Tool for Spirituality ... Through Stories... but with a twist

"Those living committed lives not only learned that they can make a difference, but they acquired a sense of 'We'.... Volunteer activity can lead to the development of a consciousness of a new, larger 'We'."

-Dr. Sharon Doloz Parks
Lives of Commitment

"If there's only one thing you can do to help volunteers and missionaries get ready for their post-service, everyday life, it is to help them learn to tell their story."

These sage words of a life-long worker with Church-based missionary programs answer the question: What's the best form of support a volunteer program can give those finishing up their term of service? This advice finds recent support from a Harvard University professor. Howard Gardner says, "leadership is the ability to influence others' thoughts and actions by telling stories which impact and touch others' lives." Not only do leaders help others to create a vision, leaders also embody their own story in the way they live their personal lives.

Religious people call this "witness." Everyday earth people call it "walking the talk." Formers know this idea: How you live your life adds credibility and consistency to your "story" or message.

But Gardner adds a twist that formers may want to consider: leadership happens in the mind and is essentially a thought-filled or cognitive experience. Formers who value their life experiences can help others to appreciate *their* own as well. As leaders, formers can construct their personal story or help others interpret *their* own story. Was this a part of your "dis-orientation" or re-entry process? Most volunteer programs help soon-to-be formers to "tell their story" about what they experienced during their time of service... and that's great! Here's a next step: Leaders help identify and articulate the story of those around them. Once you are skilled at telling your *own* story, does doing so thereby help your listeners learn something about *themselves*? How can this approach to leadership apply to your spirituality? If spirituality is the way people journey to God, then the way you think about and live out your spirituality can help others on *their* spiritual journey, for example, to explore the sacredness, richness, depth and complexity of their lives. It often takes years to develop your spiritual leadership skills as you journey with God and others. Happy trails!

We Want to Hear from YOU for Our Next Issue of *Staying Connected*!

If you want peace, work for justice... We've all heard these words first spoken by Pope Paul VI. But, what do they really mean for you? In our next issue of *Staying Connected* we'll explore topics of peace and justice. What are some organizations worth tapping into? What does the Catholic Church say about justice? We'll also offer considerations about socially conscious investing! Give us your input! Please contact us with your insights, ideas and resources!

New York City: former volunteer sightings -- Tell us where formers are gathering, going to church and attending other events of interest in the Big Apple! 🍎

Pallotti01@aol.com or call toll-free: 1-877-VOL-LINK

