

# staying connected

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

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## Relationships for Dummies: A Guide to Unpacking Your Volunteer Experience and Building Intimacy with Others

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"Relationships for dummies? What are you trying to say," you ask. OK, forgive the reference to the popular book series... the truth is that former volunteers aren't "dummies" at all when it comes to relationships. *In fact, "formers" might even be one step ahead of the game when it comes to building and maintaining meaningful relationships.* Still, the thoughts that follow could prove useful in helping us further awaken our full relationship potential. Consider the following ideas:

As you well know, volunteer service is an intense time filled with a variety of rich, unique, challenging and, sometimes, down right frustrating experiences and relationships. The good news is that the unique experiences and relationships that were a part of our volunteer service provided us with great potential for growth. They nurtured skills and values useful for establishing and maintaining deeper, more meaningful relationships now and during years to come.

In this issue of *Staying Connected*, we'll ask you to think back to your volunteer and community living experiences. Our guess is that during your time of service, you developed all sorts of skills that you can now nurture and use to build stronger, more intimate relationships. Read on to take a closer look at two of these key relationship skills (awareness and self-disclosure), to see how well you've honed them, and to explore ways of growing more intimate with yourself, God and others.

### HOW READY FOR INTIMACY ARE YOU?

Reflect on your past experiences, especially on your time as a volunteer or missionary. Use the questions below to see how open to others your mind and heart is... in other words, how "Ready for Intimacy" are you? (Use the scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = Not sure, 2 = somewhat disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.)

1. I pretty much know what motivates me. \_\_\_\_
2. I think about and am careful to avoid self-deception. \_\_\_\_
3. I was comfortable being myself in my volunteer community. \_\_\_\_
4. I know myself pretty well. \_\_\_\_
5. Fellow volunteers who know me would say I'm a trusting person. \_\_\_\_
6. In my community, I was open to the new ideas and perspectives of my housemates. \_\_\_\_
7. I was willing to share my hopes, fears, and dreams with my housemates. \_\_\_\_
8. I'm comfortable telling people where I stand on issues. \_\_\_\_
9. My friends would say I'm good at sharing my feelings. \_\_\_\_
10. People who know me would say I'm not self-absorbed. \_\_\_\_
11. I have a friend(s) who challenges me and helps me question important matters. \_\_\_\_
12. I am open to receiving feedback about my journey in life. \_\_\_\_

### AWARENESS & SELF-DISCLOSURE: KEY SKILLS FOR BUILDING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

By awareness we mean a wide range of skills, including listening, honesty with regard to self-deception and a willingness to probe and understand your own motivations. It includes the skills of really knowing who you are (discernment), why you do what you do (motivation), where your heart is (values), avoidance of denial and self-deception (honesty), and an openness to the mystery of others (presence).

Look back on your answers to the survey items numbered 1 - 6 above. Do you think of yourself as someone who has any particular skills of self-discernment? Or, do you tend to go overboard into self-absorption or self-preoccupation? Do you trust yourself, others? Do you tend to see yourself and others with new eyes? Your answers should give a sense of how awake you are to yourself and others, in other words, what your level of awareness is.

Re-visiting your volunteer experience: Community lifestyle - One blessing of community living, perhaps disguised at first, is it encourages honesty and even confrontation among its members. Volunteers practically live on top of one another for a year or more, often resulting in the need to resolve daily irritations and annoying behaviors which have strained the lives of the community members. As trust grows and friendships develop, good friends can challenge one another's assumptions about their motivations, values and honesty.

(Awareness & Self-Disclosure' continued on page 2)





**Service lifestyle** – As volunteers, we were exposed to many different forms of poverty and wealth (economic, emotional, spiritual, etc.), to new cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Hopefully, these diverse encounters now help us to see people in a truer light, seeing past our own preconceived ideas and judgments about race, wealth, culture and other differences.



**Follow-up question:** Consider the different relationships you had when you volunteered (i.e., with housemates, co-workers, clients, students, etc.). How did experiences with them awaken you to a deeper sense of the real you? To the mystery and uniqueness of others? Brainstorm specific ways you can use any lessons learned to bring heightened awareness, and thereby greater intimacy, to your relationships now.

**AWARENESS EXERCISE: Circles of Trust** – Awareness of trust, of who you trust and why, and making decisions based on this trust, is one of the most foundational skills for strengthening your relationships with family, friends and God. Use the circles to the right, follow the directions and explore how you really relate to others.

1. Make a list of the 5 or 10 key people in your life? Assign a different number to each person, in no particular order.
2. Place the number representing each person in their appropriate circle, with the most trusted in the inner circle, etc.
3. Review where you've placed these key people. Any surprises? In real life, is there any relationship whose trust level you want to strengthen?
4. If so, consider discussing with that person which aspects of your relationship seem to be working well and which less so.
5. Be willing to fix or get rid of what's not working well in your relationships.



**By paying attention to your level of awareness** you will have "more" of a self to bring to others in relationship, be that to a friendship, to a spouse, to God.

**By self-disclosure we mean** the ability to share with others important aspects of your experiences, thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams. Self-disclosure is not simply sharing information with others; it involves sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. Self-disclosure involves risk and vulnerability on the part of the person who asks for and who gives information about themselves.



**Look back on your answers** to the survey items numbered 7-12 on the previous page. Do you think of yourself as someone who is slow to share yourself with others, too quick to do so, or somewhere in between? Are you better at telling or listening? Your answers should give you a sense of how well you've honed the skill of self-disclosure.



**Re-visiting your volunteer experience:** When successful, community living fosters a sharing, accepting and trusting environment. As volunteers, we risked getting hurt by sharing our real selves. We invited our housemates to do the same by our openness to the stories, thoughts, dreams, and fears close to their hearts. A valuable lesson of community living, too often learned the hard way, is the importance of letting your fellow volunteers know before it's too late when something they do hurts or upsets you, and an unnecessary burst of anger unleashes itself.



**Follow-up question:** Consider the different relationships you had when you volunteered (i.e., with housemates, co-workers, clients, students, etc.). In what way was self-disclosure part of your experiences with them? What impact did self-disclosure have on these relationships. How can you use similar self-disclosure skills to nurture intimacy in your relationships now?

**SELF-DISCLOSURE EXERCISE: Draw Your Level of Self-Disclosure** – The Johari window shows how much information you know and share about yourself and how much others know and share about you. The window contains four panes as shown:

**Open Pane** – What you and others know about you. **Blind Pane** – Information about yourself to which you are blind, but which is known by others. **Hidden Pane** – Information you know about yourself, but is hidden to others. **Unknown Pane** – What you and others do not know about yourself.

It is through two acts, telling others and listening to others, that our open pane is expanded and that we gain access to the potential within us represented by the unknown pane. What does your own personal self-disclosure window look like? How can you expand your "open pane?"



**By paying attention to your level of self-disclosure** you will learn about how another person thinks and feels about you and vice versa. Mutual disclosure deepens trust in the relationship and helps both people better understand each other. Criticism can be offered in this context in a life-giving and non-threatening way that can challenge us to become more whole: living a life consistent with God's will.

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

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**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. **Location:** Local Pallotti Centers are in Boston, Paterson, NJ, St. Louis and Sacramento.

The National Office is in Washington, DC. **Inspiration:** 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.



# Spirituality ~ the search for the discovery of God's transforming presence in our lives

## Relationships Rooted in "Likeness" and "Otherness"

"Awesome! Absolutely a miracle!" That is the response the birth of a child most frequently evokes in the parents. The newborn's "perfection," 10 finger and 10 toes, all in the right places, its complexity is a marvel, a miracle, a gift of creation, a participation in God's ongoing creation.

Similarly, a woman who falls in love with a man, and vice versa, and close friendships also experience a profound sense of awe. For, in a sense, they together are also in the business of making a new creation, their relationship of love. Of course there's also a lot of high-energy chemistry, mutual attraction that helps initially bond these persons to one another. In the beginning of a friendship or romance, the couple often marvels at the similarity of their values, their compatibility, that they feel so comfortable being together and talking for hours. This likeness is a great source of joy, comfort and support. What helps the relationship blossom over time and brings it to creative fruition, however, may be balancing their oneness with their otherness, with the creativity of their otherness.

The creation story in the bible's book of Genesis gives us some clues. We know from the story of Adam and Eve's eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, that they discover they are different from God. Not only are they not God, but God is different, totally Other, a mystery beyond them, separate from their own identity, whom they can neither control nor second guess.

Today, the same discoveries of sameness and otherness gradually deepen as relationships progress between a man and a woman, between parent and child, between close friends. One person can neither control, mind-read nor speak on behalf of the other person. Each person has a depth of mystery, a future potential that is gradually discovered, unpacked and celebrated over time as the relationship matures.

When you think about your own strongest relationships, whether in your family or among friends, what characterizes them? Similarity of values is essential. But, some people say the relationships that seem to be the "best" are those that also recognize the "otherness," the mystery and uniqueness, the touch of divinity in the other person. For these relationships, whether with parents, spouses or very close friends, all seem rooted in a sense of respect for the otherness of their loved ones, which sacramentally points to the Otherness of God's presence.

Volunteers who have lived in a community and who have had experiences of taking their community members seriously, spending time together, and who have argued and forgiven one another, have moved closer to embracing this mystery. Perhaps like Adam and Eve, they have met their own personal limits, mistakenly or purposefully crossed some boundaries, gained a glimmer of the awesomeness of their housemates and moved closer to entering the mystery of otherness.

Try nurturing a recognition of otherness in your relationships: listen to others more closely; remind yourself of the uniqueness and potential of others; try to let go of pre-conceived ideas; in prayer, quiet your mind and open your eyes and heart to the mystery of others. How else can you envision appreciating and fostering a sense of otherness in your relationships? Think of some people that are close to you. How might these relationships change over time as you develop a more balanced awareness of "otherness" and "likeness?"



## FORMER VOLUNTEER SIGHTINGS IN THE... BOULDER, COLORADO SPRINGS, & DENVER, CO AREAS



### Monthly former volunteer gatherings & more:

- Colorado Vincentian Volunteers invites "formers" and other interested people to join the current CVV volunteers for Mass & dinner at "Woody's Place" (the volunteers' home) in Denver on any Monday evening (except in July), beginning at 5:45 pm. CVV also hosts regular service projects and social events for alumni of volunteer programs and other young adults. CVV organizes a liturgy & dinner for formers on the 2nd Sunday of each month at 6 pm at 1732 Pearl St., Denver. CVV will also offer 2 immersion weekends in Feb. & March, 2002 in Denver & El Paso. Call Mary Frances or Bill Jaster at CVV, 303-863-8141, for details about any of these events.
- Casa Karibu Sze-Ming hosts weekly liturgy and occasional programming for returned overseas missionaries and other former volunteers. Contact Jim and Karen Weaver at 303-294-9480 for details.
- Regis University - Romero House. Call 303-964-9991 for more info.
- Catholic Worker in Denver. Call 303-296-6390 for more info.

### Some parishes where "formers" attend:

- 10:30 Catholic Community, 303-333-9366, meets at Capitol Heights Presbyterian Church, 1100 Fillmore St, Denver, 11:00 am Sunday.
- Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 303-831-7010, 1530 Logan St, Denver; Young Adult Mass celebrated by Archbishop Charles Chaput, 6:30 pm Sunday.
- Regis University, 303-458-4100, 3333 Regis Blvd, Denver, 11:00 am and 7:30 pm Sunday.
- St. Elizabeth of Hungary, 303-534-4014, 1060 St. Francis Way, Denver (on the Auraria Campus), 9:00 am Sunday.

### Retreat opportunities & spirituality centers:

- Jesus Our Hope Hermitage, 303-697-6111, 10519 S. Deer Creek Road, Littleton.
- Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House, 303-688-4198, 10758 Highway 7, Allenspark.
- St. Benedict's Monastery, 970-927-1162, 1012 Monastery Rd, Snowmass.
- Vincentian Center for Spirituality and Work, 303-383-1610, 416 22nd Ave, Denver.

### Social justice organizations & events:

- American Friends Service Committee, 303-623-3464, 901 W. 14th Avenue, Denver.
- Archdiocesan Office of Social Concerns, 303-715-3171, 1300 S. Steele Street, Denver.
- Bijou Community (Altermi-T's), 719-635-5078, 411 W. Bijou Street, Colorado Springs.
- Colorado Campaign for Middle East Peace, contact Mark Schneider, 303-296-3975.
- Denver Catholic Worker House, 303-296-6390, 2420 Welton Street, Denver; liturgy celebrated Thursday evenings at 7:30 pm.
- Denver Justice and Peace Committee, 303-623-1463, 901 W. 14th Avenue, Denver.
- Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, 303-444-6981, P.O. Box 1156, Boulder.

### Local volunteer opportunities:

- Broadway Assistance Ctr, 303-893-4108, 605 W. 6th Ave, Denver.
- COMPA Food Ministry, 303-294-0272, 4120 Brighton Blvd., Denver.
- Metro CareRing, 303-860-7200, 1100 E. 18th Avenue, Denver.
- Neighborhood Partners, 303-298-1458, 3550 Humboldt St, Denver.

### Fun coffee houses:

- Common Grounds, 303-458-5248, 3484 W. 32nd Ave, Denver.
- The Market, 303-534-5140, 1445 Larimer Street, Denver.
- St. Mark's, 303-322-8384, 2019 E. 17th Ave, Denver.
- Sweet Rockin' Coffee, 303-318-9788, 414 E. 20th Ave, Denver.

*We are grateful to everyone who contributed information to this section. Thanks for helping us support other former volunteers!*

Visit our on-line community of former volunteers on our website, [www.pallotticenter.org](http://www.pallotticenter.org)! Click to the formers section where you can find lists of resources for the entire country, and add more ideas of your own... anytime!



# staying connected

## In this Issue *Relationships:*

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## Leadership and Healthy Relationships: A Willingness to Wrestle

When asked what was the hardest part about volunteering, former volunteers sometimes give an answer surprising to those who have not had similar experiences: "community living." Why so surprising? "Formers" will usually also tell you they had thought that living with a group of other volunteers, presumably committed to many of the same values and priorities (social justice, service, spirituality, simple lifestyle, etc.), would have been like a miniature utopia, a peaceful commune, as each of the community's members selflessly worked together for societal and spiritual well-being. Perhaps, such a perfectly harmonious community living situation is possible. In reality, however, community living tends to be an emotional roller coaster ride, full of unexpected bumps, twists, turns and thrills.

Here's an unusual idea: perhaps these varied and relatively frequent personal, emotional and spiritual struggles encountered while living in community actually suggest the presence of a web of healthy, healing relationships. In his book, "A World Waiting to be Born: Civility Rediscovered," M. Scott Peck, M.D. asserts that health, or a healthy relationship, is not a state of perfect wellness (like a mythical community of volunteers without any problems). Rather, it is a condition of on-going healing. Put another way, a healthy community is not without arguments and angry or hurtful moments. It is usually filled with them! But the healing relationships of a *healthy* community actively and effectively struggle to address problems and work through painful issues.

Many problems in relationships stem from the attempt to *avoid* painful issues. Not addressing these issues, and not accepting the necessary amount of emotional pain that comes along with discussing them, just makes existing problems worse. Pain, emotional or physical, is the *signal* of a disease or a problem in a relationship, not the disease or problem itself. Indeed, pain and suffering is primarily a disease-preventing mechanism that we need to experience as we struggle for greater health, as we strive for wholeness. The experiences of former volunteers bear witness to a common desire to live outside comfort zones, to be "real" in our relationships, and to accept and work through the *appropriate* amount of pain necessary for healthy living.

As volunteers, our willingness to wrestle with painful issues, to work through our different priorities, values and needs, was a defining, integral part of our experience. None of us were perfect, but in our struggles for wholeness, for holiness, we participated in a divine, healing process. Perhaps in this way more than any other, in our voluntary choice to live, struggle and participate in the healing process with a group of people whom we had never known, we shared a bond more important than all our differences put together. Former volunteers can join together and be leaders in building more intimate relationships by remembering this bond, by reflecting on the struggles and pain we faced and accepted, by not forgetting the joy we shared as we healed together, and by continuing to seek and be open to new ways of participating in God's grace-filled healing process.

## THE PAGES & THE LINKS

~ references for open minds ~



For a list of excellent on-line and hard copy resources on relationships, visit our website. Click on "Staying Connected," then click on the "relationship" issue.



[www.pallotticenter.org](http://www.pallotticenter.org)

Visit the on-line community of "formers" on our website, where you can lend & obtain support from other former volunteers in the Discussion Forum, join the Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners, find and share great Resources in Your Area, and much more!

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

***Post-service education and grad school... How can "formers" decide?***

Also tips on how to be a life-long learner.

*Please tell us your experiences with these challenges and any recommended resources.*

**Cincinnati, Cleveland & Dayton, OH: former volunteer sightings --**

What's happening with former volunteers in the buckeye state? Let us know where formers are gathering, going to church and attending other events!



**stayingconnected@pallotticenter.org or call toll-free: 1-877-VOL-LINK**