



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 Three, Number Two

Overview: The Spiritualities of Lay Volunteers.

One of the many reasons lay volunteers choose to serve with a particular program may be because of that program's emphasis on spirituality and prayer.

However, sometimes you may find prayer all but forgotten in your busy life. But as John Sealey's article points out, prayer is a necessity which acknowledges the need for God's continued guidance in our life long journey.

As volunteers, we become exposed to different

cultural traditions and even the "traditions" of fellow volunteers. From this we may come to understand that prayer is not the same experience for everyone. Mary Taylor's article looks at the variety of prayer-styles she has come across during her years as a Claretian Volunteer.

The Worksheet page will allow you to discuss and explore the topic of prayer with your community, friends, co-workers, or individually. Our hope is that this issue (and all issues) of *Shared Visions* will serve to help you along your journey.

Guidance on the Journey

--John Sealey

"I have my own preferences, my own longings, and I grasp after them, but as I learn to be more receptive to God's assistance and accompaniment I learn that in God's divine loving perversity I receive what is best for me. Though I extend my hand with desires and expectations I am learning not to have my hands 'pre-formed' to what must be put there, but to remain choiceless, sensitively ready to unwrap God's presence . . .

*In spiritual life it is important to have desires, but not demands; hopes, but not hardened expectations. By accepting my blindness I receive the sight which faith provides. I am learning to be grateful for however God comes and for whatever God brings."*¹

Father Lawrence Gillick, S.J. in his above reflection describes a desired attitude and openness in prayer. Reflecting on my experience as a Jesuit International Volunteer in Belize, Central America I am only now realizing the practical wisdom of his insight.

Near the end of my second year as a volunteer, we held a retreat focusing on the theme of "Simple Lifestyle." In the course of our evening session the tone of our discussion took on an increasingly incendiary nature. My five-person community was intensely concerned that another community was violating simple lifestyle with a recently acquired T.V. and murmurings of a washing machine. They in turn cried foul on our rum consumption and compulsion for music cassettes. Naturally, we came to no resolution that evening and our two communities became only further polarized, entrenching in our positions and looking

The Prayer Experience

--Mary Taylor

When I began working as a Claretian Volunteer in 1989, praying through song was to me the ultimate in prayer experience. While nothing can beat a well-rehearsed, well-presented sung prayer, I have gradually discovered that there are many different forms of prayer, and my prayer-life has changed quite a bit. No dramatic conversion experience, but a slow process in discovering more about myself and what works for me in prayer.

During my first year as a volunteer, we had community night once a week, and each week one of us in the community would prepare prayer. It was one of those nights that shattered my illusions that we all pray in pretty much the same way. One of my community members shared with us, as a means of reflection, a short passage from the novel she was currently reading. To me it said absolutely nothing, but it had obviously spoken to her enough that she wanted to share it with us. The same person has also used examples from Kierkegaard as tools for reflection. I personally have never understood Kierkegaard, but again,

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

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- Worksheet Questions and Activities on Prayer
- Reflection and prayer: group or individual

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for alliances among our companion volunteers.

Several months later I expressed our unresolved concerns to the national director of JIV as he facilitated our re-entry retreat to the U.S. After listening to my concerns, he simply asked how often our community had been praying together. I confided that community prayer had become increasingly rare for us as we moved into our second year as volunteers. Perhaps if I had been more open to God's presence in our midst I would have seen how *Pharisaic* our feud had become. I had mistaken simple lifestyle for *rigorously observing an ambiguous set of rules* rather than a *disposition of detachment*. Furthermore, by focusing on the blindness of the other community, I failed to see how complex my own life had become.

Jesus' Good News was one of liberation for those oppressed by human institutions and legalisms. Liberation is freedom from that which keeps us from being fully human and although in my case it was not the need for social or economic liberation, it was the need for liberation nevertheless--liberation from my own compulsions and attachments. As a volunteer I frequently tried to control situations, craving successes in my teaching ministry. This desire is not wrong in itself, but without prayer, it was perceived as attainable only by our own sheer effort. Naturally then, when I failed in my work, I experienced

misery and depression. Sometimes it is only in this brokenness that one can become open to God's grace, new possibilities, and guidance on the journey.

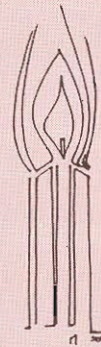
The "journey" motif is frequently used by spiritual writers. Perhaps you've reflected on your own discernment to serve and your present ministry as a journey. If you are preparing to move on from your service placement you may perceive this as a continuation of the journey. The idea of a journey involves two elements. First, a movement geographically, temporally, ideologically or spiritually from one location to another. Secondly, in a journey there is an element of unknowing. A commute to work in the morning may indeed involve movement, but it's hardly a journey as we come to know the streets well and our unknowing gives way to routine.

Although it is difficult to "let go," to allow myself to be freed from the compulsion to control circumstances, relationships, and even prayer, I believe Father Gillick's approach to spirituality is correct. Prayer, in my experience, now involves growing more comfortable with unknowing, thereby continuing to preserve the journey in spirituality.

¹ Lawrence Gillick, S.J., "The Man Born Blind," *The Way*. 1985, pp 87-95.

John Sealey, is a former Jesuit Int'l Volunteer (Belize, Central Am.)

Group or Individual Prayer and Reflection



First, focus and relax the group by lighting a candle and asking people to quiet themselves.

Biblical reading: Read aloud Luke 24:13 ff., the story of the disciples' experience along the road to Emmaus.

Allow a few moments for reflection.

Introduction: (*Reader reads aloud while others reflect.*) The feeling of being "fully alive" is an experience some lucky people have occasionally. For others, it is a dream that is glimpsed only faintly. But let's use our imagination for a few moments and think about how our "aliveness" comes in degrees. Perhaps you feel most fully alive when you're dancing, or when playing sports, or when helping a neighbor? As a form of prayer, think about and then share with others your response to the following questions (reader pauses a couple minutes after reading each question to allow for reflection):

- 1. Have there been any times or activities** in my life when I have felt very much alive? In your mind, recall the setting and what your "aliveness" feels like.
- 2. Who are the persons in my life** who seem especially alive? Recall what it is about them that gives you this impression.
- 3. Have there been any times during this past week** when you've felt particularly alive? Recall the setting. What was this like?
- 4. To what extent have you had a religious experience** similar to the disciples on the road to Emmaus--a time when you felt particularly close to Christ?

In Closing: Give participants an opportunity to share which reflection struck him/her most.

End with prayers of thanksgiving.

St. Vincent Pallotti Center's Day of Recollection.

Are you a current or former volunteer living in the Washington, DC area? If so, you may be interested in

"Creating Community in a Post-Volunteer World"
Together we'll explore some of the various ways that life (and faith) can be shared with others.

When: Saturday, April 24th

Where: at the Pallottine Seminary in Hyattsville, MD.

Call or write us for more information!

SVPC, PO Box 893--Cardinal Station, Washington, DC 20064, 202-529-3330

for *her* it works. These experiences opened my mind up--slowly, I'll admit--to trying other, less traditional, forms of prayer.

Now that I'm here in Guatemala, I've experienced other forms of worship, some of which I've adopted either as a whole, or in bits and pieces, and there are other ways of worship that I just don't get, and probably never will. One of my favorite parts of the Mass in the Q'eqchi' language is the community prayer. It takes place during the time in the liturgy where the Prayer of the Faithful comes in, but instead of reading pre-printed petitions from some liturgy service that has no idea of the reality of the people here, a catechist begins praying out loud and then the whole congregation joins in, each one voicing his or her own needs, thanks and praise. It gets pretty loud, and then, slowly, as people come to the end of their prayer, things quiet down again. *For me it has a tranquilizing effect, kind of like at the end of a really incredible song or movie, when everyone is silent, moved by*

the experience.

There are, of course, the devotions that I'll never understand. During December, here in the parish, there is a novena to the Immaculate Conception. Unfortunately, for those of us whose bedrooms are about ten feet from the church, the novena begins at 4:30 a.m. and lasts for 9 days. Between the church bell ringing, music being played, and firecrackers popping all over --sleep is impossible. When I asked some of the parishioners why they celebrate this novena, I was told "Because we've always done it." That kind of makes me wonder. If what you want to do is celebrate and make all this effort to "please the Virgin Mary," why not use the time, energy, and money spent on the novena to do something for the poorer people in town? Have a meal or a party and invite the poorest of the poor. I bet that the Virgin Mary would be a lot happier with something like that, and she wouldn't have to get up at 4:30 for the party!

While I can think of a few ways

to change worship practices for others, who am I to do it? As long as within myself there is an ongoing conversion process in my life and my prayer-life, I should be able to try and understand the "whys" of different forms of prayer. Unfortunately for most of us, if something is different from what we're used to, we tend to want to change or adapt it until we're comfortable with it. That may work in some instances, but what about the people who *practice* what we try to change? I think we're not being fair to them or to ourselves.

The good part about different prayer forms and styles is that there are so many. We're bound to find where our place is in one or several of these prayer traditions. While I still prefer to pray by myself, I have become much more comfortable in shared prayer experience, and feel that these times have allowed me to see more of others, but more importantly, more of myself.

Mary Taylor, is a current Claretian Volunteer (Guatemala, Central Am.)

What's Your Prayer-Style?

Current and former volunteers approach shared prayer with people in their community or others in many ways. Which, if any, of the following "people" seem closest to your prayer-style?

MS. NATURAL: "When I think about sharing prayer with others, it seems like a natural thing to do. It's an important part of everyday life. So if we did not have it at all, I would miss it."

MR. SHY: "I like to keep to myself. I guess I'm a little shy so sharing prayer for me would feel a little forced. I'm not all that comfortable with it, but it's o.k. to do sometimes."

MR. SECRET: "I think of myself as religious, but I'm more like the guy in the bible who, when it's time to pray, prays in private rather than in public."

MS. NOT-AT-ALL: "Praying is something I'm not into at all. I feel no need for it. I just pay attention to what's happening around me. My work and my ministry **are** my prayer."

QUESTIONS: Is one of these approaches to prayer the way you want yours to be? What are aspects you like/dislike about these prayer-styles? Are there any disadvantages to these ways of prayer?

Biblical experience: The scriptures tell the stories of people on a journey to experience God. Some texts describe being close to God; others speak of distance. Where do you see yourself in this story? Read the following verses each of which gives a little different approach to prayer and conversation with God. See which one, if any, is most like your approach to prayer.

Matthew 6:5-6. *And when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites . . . but pray to your Father in secret.*

Luke 14:18. *And when they were invited, some started to make excuses . . . I've bought a piece of land and have to go see it.*

Luke 9:28. *And he took his disciples up into a mountain to pray.*

Eccles. 3:1-8. *For all things, there is a season, a time for loving and a time to refrain from loving.*

Discussion Questions on prayer-styles based on Mary Taylor's article:

1. What is your preferred prayer-style and why? (If you have trouble with this question see exercise on page 3.)

2. Have you experienced any new forms of prayer-style that you hope to continue after you complete your volunteer service?

3. Are there any prayer-styles you are uncomfortable with? What are they? Why?

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Mary Taylor's statement: "For most of us, if something is different from what we're used to, we tend to want to change or adapt it until we're comfortable with it"?

5. Share an instance where you were adaptable--where someone changed/alterd your way of doing something.

Discussion questions on prayer, listening, and tolerance based on John Sealey's article: John's article explains and shares the consideration that for him, prayer has come to mean personally living with ambiguity in a spirit of faith. While living in a community of volunteers, he felt challenged to listen with flexibility and to be tolerant of others' experiences because others were in different places along their journey.

1. John suggests that prayer includes listening with an open mind and heart to where others are along their journey. To what extent do you consider yourself to be "open" to other peoples' different approaches to specific issues? How do you think others would answer this question about you?

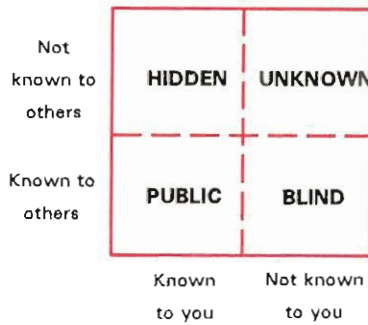
2. John also said that it can be hypocritical to focus on others' blindness while failing to notice one's own shortcomings. To what extent do you tend to get stuck thinking about OPS (Other People's Shortcomings), and to what extent do you work on correcting YOP (Your Own Problems)? Do you pray about these concerns?

3. John's article refers to prayer as a willingness to live with some "unknowing" aspects, with an alertness to watch for what new elements God may show us along our journey. What are some of the "unknowing" or challenging/unexpected experiences you have had during your volunteer service and/or community life? Share these with friends/co-workers and describe how you reacted.

Activity #1: Nurturing Your Openness to Yourself and to Others

Have you thought about "growing" your level of trust in others? Here's an exercise that could help you.

The story has it that two guys, Joe and Harry, saw that the extent to which we trust others depends on how aware we are of ourselves, how we share this information with others, and listen to what others tell us about ourselves. Joe and Harry illustrated this in their JoHari Window (below) which identifies the **Public** window as the most trusting. The **Public** area represents *the knowledge we have of ourselves and which we also then share with others*. Trust, then, is built by enlarging the **Public** area. Enlarge along the **Blind** dimension by asking for feedback (and not cutting it off by getting defensive). Enlarge along the **Hidden** dimension by giving others feedback--letting them know where you're coming from. (The two samples below use shading to illustrate the *undiscovered* aspects of ourselves.)



The JOHARI WINDOW illustrates four areas of knowledge about self:

PUBLIC - information which I know about myself and which is also know by others

HIDDEN - information which I know about myself but which I do not share with others

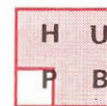
UNKNOWN - information about me which neither I nor others know

BLIND - information about me which others know but which I am unaware of

An example of a person with a growing level of trust would look something like this:



A self unaware person who distrusts others might draw a Window which looked like this:



Using the Johari Window as a guide, reflect on these questions.

1. To what extent do I share with others what I know about myself? (Example, if you share a lot with a friend, then your **Public** portion is larger and the **Hidden and Blind** part of you are smaller.)
2. To what extent am I unaware of myself? (Example: If you feel you don't reflect very much on your actions and motives your **Public** self is smaller and your **Blind** portion is larger.)
3. Using the JoHari Window, draw your self-portrait. Share this with your community, friends or co-workers. Ask for feedback. Ask them to draw how they see you. Compare the drawings.

One way of building trust is to selectively and carefully disclose information about yourself and ask for feedback. Remember, part of trust and self-awareness depends on listening to what others know and tell you about yourself.

Once you feel comfortable with the basic idea of the JoHari Window, use the following exercise and apply it to your prayer life substituting *not known/known to others* with *not shared/shared in prayer*. If you are comfortable enough with your community, friends, or co-workers you may choose to discuss together these findings as well. Since you are, however, reflecting on your own personal prayer life this activity may solely be useful to you.

Prayer, as conversation with God, includes listening to God's voice as heard through the scriptures, sacraments, daily events and through other persons. In activity #1 you explored how you listen to yourself, and share yourself with others. Now let's try the same exercise in relation to your listening to yourself (to your needs and thanksgivings) and the extent to which you share those needs and thanksgivings with God.

Activity #2: Prayer--Nurturing Your Openness to Yourself and God

If prayer is our openness to God, use the JoHari Window to express the following:

1. To what extent do I open myself to dialogue with God about who I am?
2. To what extent do I open myself to dialogue with God about what I want for myself and others?
3. Illustrate questions 1 & 2 above using the JoHari Window. If you so choose, share this with others.
4. Compare your drawings for Activities #1 and #2, how you share with others and how you share through prayer with God, respectively.

GET INVOLVED!



Bread for the World would like to invite you to take part in their Offering of Letters for two bills which will be introduced in the new Congress.

The first, **Every Fifth Child Faces Hunger in the U.S.**, is a continuation of the 1992 Offering of Letters. Last year, an estimated 140,000 letters in support of the Every Fifth Child bill served to increase spending by \$900 million for: the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Head Start, and Job Corps. In addition, Bread for the World's 1993 Offering of Letters, **Many Neighbors, One Earth**, seeks to transform U.S. foreign aid to make reducing hunger and poverty in environmentally sound ways the leading purpose of U.S. foreign aid.

Both bills are part of Bread for the World's four-year **Share the Harvest of Peace** campaign, which calls for reallocating resources from Cold War purposes to meeting human needs here and abroad.

For more information, call or write: *Bread for the World, Attn: Dorothy Pilkington, SSJ, Ed. D., 802 Rhode Island Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20018, (202) 269-0200, ext. 221. Send \$5 for an Offering of Letters kit on Many Neighbors, One Earth and \$1 for an information packet on Every Fifth Child (plus \$3 shipping).*

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, and Saint Louis. Centers will be opening soon in Paterson, NJ and northern California. 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.

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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