



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 Three

Overview: Last November the St. Vincent Pallotti Center facilitated two workshops at the annual International Liaison of Lay Volunteers in Mission Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference was a gathering of volunteer program directors and their associates from both domestic and international volunteer organizations. Our workshop was designed to initiate, discuss and to later compile ideas exploring what some volunteers/missioners experience upon completion of their term of service. (Some of you may have participated in our survey conducted to follow-up on ideas discussed at these workshops.)

In these workshops we discussed and discovered several factors which help to strengthen and weaken a volunteers' transition experiences and subsequently their re-integration into post-volunteer life. In this issue, *Re-entry Revisited* (page 2) reports on these findings. Also, in conjunction with this topic are a series of vignettes. *Saying Goodbye* illustrates the closure experiences of former volunteers.

Peter Gawienowski (Covenant House), and Megan Kamerick (Jesuit Volunteer Corps) are featured in this issue. Megan will give her own account of the challenges and surprises of going from her volunteer experience to the corporate world. Peter will share some helpful hints on completing your volunteer commitment and readying yourself to face "the real world."

This issue of *Shared Visions* may be a helpful guide as you near your inevitable day of departure. Through discussion questions in this issue's worksheet section (pages 4 and 5) we hope to help you understand your own and others' experience of transition--helping you (and your community) to determine and how smooth or rough that transition may be. We hope *Shared Visions* will also serve to turn the focus to the much bigger picture: The potential is for former volunteers to integrate their experience of service into their lives, and in this way, continuing to participate in the Church's mission.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Former volunteers share their personal stories of "transitions"
- * Discussion and worksheet exercises for individual or community use

Words of a "Prophet"

---Peter Gawienowski,
former Covenant House Volunteer

I spent two years volunteering with the Covenant House Faith Community. They were both rich and tumultuous years; the work and community life challenged me to my very core. Working with young addicts from the streets and processing pain with people doing similar work will do that. At the end of my volunteer time I kept asking myself the same questions--"Where do I go from here? What work will I do? Where will I live? What will I do for dishes, furniture, interview clothes? How do I feel about leaving? Will I find a church where I can grow? Who will be in my support

"Prophet" continued page 2...

Selling Out?

--Megan Kamerick, former JVC

I had always felt like a second-class citizen in the social justice circles after I finished my year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, because I went to work as a paralegal in environmental law at a large corporate law firm. I was afraid my friends from my volunteer year and current volunteers on other retreats looked down on my choices, and on me. I was more than a little paranoid and I used aggressive humor as armor. If people asked what I did I would say

something like, "I minister to polluters." I forgot that my life was my own, and no one was in a position to judge me.

After nearly four years in a job which I grew tired of after nine months, I will now attend graduate school at Marquette University a little wiser than when I left JVC. I do not regret my corporate experience. I learned a lot about "how the other half lives" and it's not as black and white as I thought it was. In my naivete I was astounded to find many decent people working in my law firm. I am not comfortable in corporate life, but I have de-mystified it and now feel more confident moving

between that world and the inner-city/ community based organizations.

One of the most difficult lessons I have learned in these four years after JVC is how hard it is to walk the line between trust and self-preservation. I soon learned that I could not be completely open about my opinions and feelings at work. I learned, sadly, that I simply could not trust many people on that level. In case you think you can avoid this by avoiding the for-profit world, non-profit agencies are as prone to these office politics as anyone. This was a hard lesson after a year spent learning to trust and turn the other cheek. I have tried to integrate trust

"Selling Out?" continued page 3...

system? How can I afford to move and live? Should I sell my baseball card collection and buy an old car?"

It's been three years since I left Covenant House. I've worked as a teacher and as an editor; I've run a shelter, and now I'm headed for graduate school. I don't claim to be a prophet, but here are some ideas to consider as your time as a volunteer winds down:

Take time to reflect--Look back at your notes or thoughts when you started your volunteer stint. What has changed for you? Has it lived up to your expectations? Do you feel more confused? More enlightened? I kept a journal and I found looking back to when I first joined Covenant House was good because I realized that my expectations were sky high when I came, for myself and for the work. You don't teach yourself to play guitar and become comfortable with street kids in a rush of a year. If you don't keep a journal, think about starting. You'd be amazed what you teach yourself over the months.

Prayer--Has prayer been important to you over these past months? Now is a time you can begin habits to continue after you leave, like making a commitment to ten minutes of reflection before you go to sleep. Try getting up in the middle of the night to pray; there are few distractions and it can be good to seek God before the dawn. Early Saturday mornings were my sacred time for walking in the woods; my special rock was in a park by a creek, where the birds and bugs spoke volumes to me. Prayer can be tough in a busy schedule, but it's about building a life-long relationship. Keep it simple, keep it personal, and most important keep at it.

Life after Community--For some, living alone will be just right, but I decided to live on my own after Covenant House, and it was horrible. Working as a 7th grade teacher and living in a dark basement apartment was awful for me; I needed people around me--grown up people--with whom to share my struggles (and the chores!). After a few months I looked around and found a few people from church to live with, and have lived here for a couple years. Take time to

carefully consider post-volunteer living arrangements. If you are in a city look for other former volunteers; ask around at different churches and explore the opportunities.

Simple Lifestyle--Living as a volunteer enforces a simple lifestyle, but continuing that in the salaried world has been a challenge. I still try and eat simply, I shop at second hand stores and I ride my bike to work. It's important to me to be a good steward with the resources I have available, because I'm a very wealthy person on the world's scale. What I do here does affect my brothers and sisters across the earth; it just makes sense to keep things simple.

I continue to volunteer at a shelter and at some meal programs. Other ways I've filled the gaps left after volunteering are taking classes at local universities, joining a choir of people seeking justice in Central America, and getting involved at my parish. Enjoy these last few months. Don't wait until the very end to let people know what they mean to you; now is a chance to take a few risks. May you have much joy mixed in with the sorrow of leaving. +

Re-entry Revisited

In my role at the St. Vincent Pallotti Center, I have helped facilitate workshops concerning the topic of *re-entry*, the transition back into home and life after the completion of volunteer service. During these workshops I felt I learned a lot about how volunteers respond to a period of change in their lives. In addition, volunteer program directors, in their wisdom gained from years of experience, told of the frustrations of their volunteers who, upon their preparation to end their service commitment, displayed a variety of emotions: anger, denial, sorrow, and joy are but a few.

As you approach transition (of any kind) it may be helpful to reflect on your feelings in order to evaluate what steps will help you to proceed with the least amount of trepidation. For example, if "anger" is your chosen mode of dealing with transition, you may not be able to alter that response, but you may consider the needs of others in your community.

Make them aware of your use of this type of response--even if they have noticed already!

Within the context of the Re-entry workshops, volunteer program directors helped us to list ideas which may help ease the transition of volunteers. Here are some of their suggestions:

Volunteers do well if they develop the ability to ask for what they need during their term of service. (By implication, consider what you will need during re-entry.)

Volunteers who need to deal with any anger they may have toward the Church should do so.

Volunteers should consider re-entry a long-term experience and begin at least mid-way through their term of service thinking about closure, job/school possibilities, and new living arrangements.

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A. "The day I left the small C two years I was up early for the four hours north to the airport walked out with my friend and person to see me off, I realized, 'Hey, this is it. I imagined that my neighbors and friends who street, waving goodbye . . .'"

B. "I remember the day before I was leaving my volunteer year. I had said good-bye to my by one, and at this point we were down to the next to go. I was home alone all that day, pa things. The quietness of the house caused m many events that had occurred throughout th some good. We had been through a lot toget make matters even worse, it was a rainy, mis of this house; it's time for me to go!"

C. "My supervisor had actually scheduled a okay year with him, but was not at all sad th extremely uncomfortable because he was rea said, 'Yeah I'll miss you too,' all the while fee

D. "It was raining that day and as typical fo little girl who lived below our upper flat was h came home each day from teaching. Karen v years there she turned three on her birthday.

with some common sense, but I usually learned the hard way--through trial and error.

One thing my stint in corporate land did for me was to throw me in an environment where my beliefs were fairly radical. Instead of preaching to the converted, I was challenged to really think about my values and test their strength in the face of adversity. In some ways I have backed off my previous beliefs, but in many other ways I have become more radical.

One of the biggest dangers after volunteer work is money. I don't mean worshipping a golden calf and lusting after a Mercedes. It is much more subtle than that. As I began to acquire a few credit cards and a car loan, to eat lunch out every day, and buy things I thought I "deserved," my money started drying up. I was never extravagant, but bit by bit I sank into debt. I became obsessed with not having enough money, and angry. This preoccupation was very spirit-tapping. I began to feel like a 9-to-5 slave.

I never liked discussions of simple lifestyle in my community or in JVC because they reeked of sanctimonious piety. It was one way for people to feel

"holier" than others. Slowly, however, I have come to see the importance of this concept in my life. By simplifying my life I am free to focus on more important issues like spirituality, growth and relationships.

I began with an automatic deduction from my checking account into a savings account. I moved on to cut up all my credit cards, except one for large purchases or emergencies, and started paying them off methodically. I am in the process of selling my car to pay off my bank loan. If you have never owned a car and paid for repairs and insurance, you cannot fathom how fast it can suck your wallet dry.

Now I must be honest and admit I was spurred to most of these actions by the specter of "real" poverty in graduate school. I'm lucky that I received a scholarship and a teaching assistantship, but my salary will still be less than half of what I now receive. Better late to simplicity than never, I guess.

All of this has been very difficult, and I could never have come through these "lessons" without a support system. I have found support in different places through the years. My pillar has been my

significant other, and I am lucky in that regard. But I have also formed wonderful relationships with new volunteers in Milwaukee, with my roommate, with friends I met doing community theatre, and spiritually through the Church of the Great Spirit, a Native American Catholic Church. I searched for a long time for a church where I felt a true sense of community and spirituality and finally found it. It may take awhile, but don't give up.

There are no right or wrong choices after a volunteer year. I have some regrets about things I could have done, but I believe you can learn and grow from almost any experience. It helps me if I remember what brought me into a volunteer year. As long as I remember that idealism, and that thirst I had for knowledge and spiritual growth which led me to JVC, I carry my year with me wherever I go. +

"What's Next?"

Ask your program director for our What's Next? Notebook. In it are ideas regarding the post-service stage of volunteering, such as: Getting Ready, Career, Lifestyle, and Incorporating the volunteer experience.

tral American town I had lived in for the past first bus in the morning. I would be traveling at would take me back to the States. As I llow volunteer who would be the last I somehow imagined it would be different. d gotten to know would all be lining the

go home after ousemates one e and I was the ing up my o think of the ear, some bad, r, and now each of us was moving on. To ble day. I kept thinking, 'I have to get out

eting for us to say 'good-bye.' I had had an was leaving (well, maybe a little). I was sorry to see me go. I kind of smiled and very phony. I was glad when it was over."

e tropics, it was raining hard. Karen, the ne with me which was also typical after I s small for her age. It seemed like both my id her grandmother forget how old she

was?) Anyway, we'd usually have a late lunch and read together and then she'd take a nap on our couch. But that day, about two months before I would leave her, I stood by the window with Karen propped up on my hip and together we looked out at the rain. Since Karen was born (however long ago that was) there had been a series of volunteers living above her small dwelling. She was very used to saying 'goodbye.' As the rain fell, tears fell from my eyes. Karen put her little head on my shoulder, wrapped her arms around my neck and we just remained that way for a long time, not saying a word, just listening to the rain."

E. "Strangely enough that day, my community seemed to really jell. We had a blast together on our community retreat. During the year we prayed and shared meals together, but we never had this much fun before. Could it

have had anything to do with the fact that we were getting ready to leave within the next month?"

F. "It was my last day of teaching pre-school. I had to say good-bye to 20 children whom I would most likely never see again. Most of the children did not understand this, so they went skipping out the door to go home as usual. I had to catch them to give them a hug good-bye . . ."

G. "I wasn't planning on making a big deal about leaving, but my students wanted to have an end-of-the-school-year party. I was really glad they talked me into it. It was hard, but I was glad it was hard. It showed me that I had allowed myself to enter into the lives of my girls and that we managed to understand one another in a crazy cross-cultural way. My girls still mean a lot to me. After all, they were my teachers for two years!"



SAYING GOODBYE

Former volunteers share their stories

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

On completing your volunteer service a large part of preparing to leave comes in saying "goodbye." As the vignettes or stories on pages 2 and 3 demonstrate, there are several approaches to take in getting ready for your inevitable day of departure.

The following is an exploration of each vignette. These discussion questions may give you an opportunity to focus on your feelings and thoughts, on your transition and on saying *goodbye*.

1. How would you feel if your term of service ended with the same type of send off as in story A? Do you feel as though your volunteer service will be epitomized by the final moments you share with your community, your neighbors, and your co-workers? Why or why not?
2. In story B this volunteer felt she may have waited too long before leaving. How can you avoid this happening to you? Will you be able to schedule a departure along with others?
3. Do you agree with the way the volunteer in story C handled her *goodbye* meeting? How would you have handled it?
4. In contrast to story A is story D. Story D is an example of saying *goodbye* over time without waiting 'til the last minute. Name at least three people you would like to begin saying *goodbye* to. What are some helpful ways you could begin the "parting?"
5. Mending between you and other members in your community or workplace may occur in the last few months of your commitment as shown in story E. Is there a way you could create a "jelling" situation in your final weeks/months?

What if there is a need for healing within your community or with your co-workers, but you foresee no healing taking place?

Below are listed a few suggestions for ways to put closure on an uncomfortable community situation: **Plan a Reconciliation Service.** It may be a valuable chance to celebrate your differences.

Agree to disagree. Your final weeks are a time where it is best to "accentuate the positive." You'll be surprised at how much you remember the good times over the bad, once you've been removed from your community or the situation for awhile.

6. Younger children may not feel a need to say *goodbye* as exemplified in story F. In light of this, what could volunteers working with young children do in order to prepare themselves and their charges for closure? Here is one suggestion: **Children learn through story.** Read or make up your own *goodbye story*--putting everyone, including yourself, in the story.
7. The volunteer in story G did not plan to prepare anything special for her classroom before she left. Think of something you could give (not necessarily a material item) to those you will be leaving. Symbolize your relationship with a song, a prayer, a poster, a group photo . . .

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL "SEND OFF":

Begin to get a sense of accomplishment from within yourself. Don't expect anyone and everyone to gush all over you on your last day at work. For one thing, they may not be gushers to start with.

Ask for written recommendations/critiques from your supervisor. This may be one way of finding out how your performance affected the organization you served and also the people you worked with.

Define "send off" differently. Send *yourself* off. You are ultimately responsible for your own closure, don't expect others to do it for you. In other words, you should be saying *goodbye* to others instead of waiting for them to say *goodbye* to you.

Vow not to deny others the need for closure. Think about other people's needs when preparing to leave. You might not be upset if you never see them again, but that feeling may not be the same for them.

Start saying your goodbyes as far as two months in advance of your date of departure. Think about what opportunities already exist, or some you may create, in order to say *goodbye*.

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Our articles from Peter Gawienowski and Megan Kamerick both deal mainly with what life after volunteering was like for them. Although you may still be in the midst of your volunteer year, it is never too early to start thinking about the future. Not that you need to get bogged down with your future plans, but it may be helpful to share with your community or to journal about your thoughts and reactions to these two articles along with the discussion questions below.

In addition, "Re-entry Revisited" touches on the experiences that program directors have had in working with volunteers. The final two questions on this worksheet may help to draw out your feelings about closure and beyond.

1. Both Peter and Megan experienced some difficulties in transitioning out of their volunteer experience. What difficulties do you foresee for yourself?

2. Megan initially felt guilt in working in the corporate world, but then realized that "no one was in the position to judge [her]." Who do you feel may judge you? Why do you feel their opinion is important?

3. Megan and Peter felt that their volunteer experience has been helpful in determining how they live their lives now. What are the "things" you want to take with you from your volunteer experience in order to integrate them in your life?

4. How will you deal with people who either don't understand or don't appreciate your volunteer experience?

5. Where will you look to for support upon completion of your volunteer year, and who will comprise your group of support people?

6. Megan later on appreciated the importance of a simpler lifestyle--when it was a real necessity. In what ways will your experience of living simply be helpful to you in managing your money? In a job interview? In your social life?

7. The article "Re-entry Revisited" ends with a challenge: "Your smooth transition [back into the 'real world'] is ultimately your responsibility." How will you be able to meet this challenge?

8. How do you see returning from your volunteer experience as "part of your experience"? Will telling your "story" to others be helpful? Name at least two groups you would like to make a presentation to upon your return.

Volunteers make an easier transition if they prepare for lifestyle decisions they will be facing.

Volunteers have a better transition when they learn to re-frame their "story," seeing how it fits with a Gospel understanding, and learn ways to share it with others.

Volunteers experience good transition--when they say goodbye and come to closure with friends, associates and even with their various experiences.

Both former volunteers and program directors agree that most important is that this period of transition isn't put off until later. This is a time when prayer and a little help from your friends may be the last thing on your mind. *I have too many other things to do, and This is something I have to work out alone, for myself* are two responses that will not help you in the long run.

Your smooth transition is ultimately your responsibility. Make sure you take the time you deserve to insure proper closure to your year(s) of service. Consider this part of your experience--a continuation of your ministry--an opportunity for growth in your life and faith.†

- Leah Sealey

A New St. Vincent Pallotti Center has opened in Paterson, NJ.

Linda Ferriero, a former Jesuit Volunteer, is the Director at our newest Center.

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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, Paterson, NJ, Saint Louis. A new Center will be opening soon in 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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