



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 Four

Overview: Do you remember your first days as a new volunteer? Whether it was a month ago or a year ago, you probably remember being filled with excitement and ideas about the coming year.

Think of your initial expectations about your work, your community and the people you would serve. In this issue of Shared Visions, we invite you to examine those initial expectations, to do a "reality check" of sorts. Use the following articles and exercises as tools to determine what expectations were realistic and what might be in need of modification.

Last fall Ed Phillips (St. Michael School, AZ) wrote in Shared Visions about his expectations as a new volunteer. This year, as he begins his second year of service, Ed reflects on those expectations and how he has revised them for the year to come.

Linda Dworak (Salesian Volunteers) takes us through her

two years in Mexico, the challenge to be flexible in her expectations, and the growth and satisfaction that resulted.

We encourage you to take time for the individual reflection questions, as well as to have some fun with the group exercises pertaining to community.

IN THIS ISSUE...What did you expect?

- A close look at volunteers' initial expectations, their challenges and discoveries;
- Group activity and personal reflection exercises.

The Challenge to Be Flexible

*-Linda Dworak,
former Salesian Volunteer*

When I first set off for Tijuana, Mexico where I would spend two years as a Salesian Lay Missioner, I anticipated that I would live a simple and humble lifestyle, that I would use my college education to teach others, that I would be supported by a spiritually strong community and most of all, that I would spend all of my time working directly with the poorest of the poor in the most isolated and under-served regions of the city. I soon discovered that my volunteer experience would be filled with unforeseen challenges, disappointments and delights.

During my first six months, I worked as a community education coordinator in one of the most impoverished districts of the Tijuana. There thousands of makeshift homes stood precariously on dusty hillsides, where no running water, electricity or sewage system were available. I struggled with the language, the heat and the dust, but I

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Bridging Gaps

*-Ed Phillips,
St. Michael School*

SVPC: *Last year at this time we asked several new volunteers to share some of their expectations. Ed Phillips, a veteran school counselor, was just beginning his term of volunteer service at St. Catherine Indian Boarding School in New Mexico. At that time, he said one of his expectations was he wanted to help bridge the gaps between the Native American and Anglo cultures. Now a year later, we asked him to do a "before and after" comparison of his expectations.*

SVPC: *Knowing what you know now, Ed, what do you think of your initial expectations?*

EP: I learned first hand that you have to be flexible and ready to modify your expectations. I had worked for years in a fairly large public school system. The school schedule and my responsibilities held few surprises. I had assumed that my personal sense of serenity would continue during my volunteer service. Instead, it was challenged and I had to really struggle to find an inner peacefulness.

Most volunteer programs are small and so require everyone involved to be ready to make continual adjustments. For example, one of my volunteer friends was a wonderful person, very altruistic, with high aspirations and very giving toward others. But she found that the young people she was serving did not want to receive her gifts.

At lot of volunteers, myself included, start with a very strong sense of wanting to help others. Volunteers know that they themselves may not be

"Bridging Gaps" continued next page...

saints, but are basically good persons. When you go to serve in another culture, though, you have to be ready to put this part of yourself on the back burner, because it may not initially count in the eyes of the people you serve.

SVPC: *How so?*

EP: A very insightful Indian youth put it this way in talking about why a volunteer coming to work on an Indian reservation may not get a very warm welcome. "The volunteer has to realize it's not **who you are** that counts, it's **what you are** that counts."

SVPC: *That sounds contrary to everything we grow up with Ed, that who you are, your intentions and motives are very important.*

EP: That's right. Most volunteers probably appreciate and emphasize the importance of "who" a person is, namely their good intentions, personal integrity, where the person's heart is. But what the young person was saying was that when an Anglo comes to the reservation, initially that volunteer is a **what**, often an Anglo, who is foreign to our Indian beliefs and values. So however well-intentioned the volunteer is, it's important but secondary to the beliefs and values of the people the volunteer wants to serve.

SVPC: *Is this young person calling for a radical shift in the way volunteers think?*

EP: In a sense, she was. She was saying that a volunteer may need to focus more on where the other people are coming from, and less on the volunteer's own good intentions.

SVPC: *It seems that any volunteer could encounter this same call to conversion, be it in an inner city or rural area, in the USA or overseas. So how can a volunteer modify his or her expectations to deal with this type of shift? How did you do it?*

EP: I'm still working on this. But it goes both ways. I think initially the challenge for volunteers is take the first steps toward bridging the gaps. But volunteers have to challenge the people they serve as well. Volunteers have to tell people that we may look different from them physically or speak with a different accent. But we may all have suffered some of the same things, feeling marginal, perhaps neglect, being pulled toward addictions or whatever. I shared that just because I was born in an Anglo society, it does not mean I haven't experienced some of the same kinds of things that happen to those born into another culture.

SVPC: *You've been a counselor for several decades Ed, do you have any advice for volunteers for some ways they can modify their expectations?*

EP: There's three things they can do, things that I'm still working on. First get more information about the people they are serving. Read about their culture and talk to knowledgeable people. Forewarned is forearmed.

I found from my volunteer experience that a second thing volunteers should do is become more sensitive to the other culture. It really helps to talk with people who respect the culture's beliefs and values. Volunteers should focus on learning to respect and express their respect for the culture in which they are serving. Respect for ancestors, for example, is real important in Indian cultures. Also, respect for nature is in their very blood and they grow up with a strong sense of oneness with nature.

In the beginning, volunteers might be clueless about these things. Volunteers don't have to agree with everything, but they have to know what their people believe and appreciate their values.

SVPC: *And the third tool for adjusting*

EP: Never forget you're a visitor. The find you're in conflict with some volunteers, your employer or you been sent there by Jesus himself visitor. This helps you to keep more attention to listening to what have to know your own beliefs and on. That can be a life saver.

SVPC: *Looking back on this year, Ed, t filled?*

EP: Partially. That's why I now want the Native American Indians to b cultures, the Anglo world and the these worlds, is to be adrift in bo the same applies to me. Now tha more confident about my own eff bridge these two worlds and that reasons for volunteering.

SVPC: *Thank you very much for sharing*

For Personal Reflection

What are your expectations?

Many volunteers tell us the people's lives. They also to structures that block the po life. This leads some volun service, to speak up on beh how change works on a pe following.

1. Who is someone in your life that happened, how did that
2. Who is someone you admire behalf of the poor? What c in the lives of the poor?
3. How do you see yourself e the poor?

What are your expectations?

Some volunteers tell us tha during their time of service

For these volunteers, their So with this in mind, can ye up on behalf of the poor? V gospels in which Jesus exp become voices for the voice marginal people?

Expectations?

is real important especially when you
ly, whether it's those you serve, fellow
lf. Even if you are convinced you have
erve these people, you are still a
own ego in the background and pay
thers are telling you. Of course you
have a personal spirituality to fall back

What extent were your expectations

do a second year. Initially I wanted
ffective in living and working in both
own. To be able to live in only one of
of them. But now after a year, I feel
have had some experience, I also feel
iveness. I feel I'm now better able to
omething that was one of my main

our thoughts with us, Ed. †

on/ Group Discussion

about making a difference?

want to make a difference in
us they want to change society's
from access to a better way of
ers, now or after their terms of
f of the poor. For some clues as to
on-to-person level, consider the

who has spoken up for you? When
make you feel?

what has been a spokesperson on
ference has he or she made

er being or becoming a voice for

s about deepening spirituality?

one of their expectations is that
ey will deepen their spirituality.

vice is an expression of their faith.
think of times when Jesus spoke
hat are some examples from the
ted and asked his followers to
ss, spokespersons for society's

"The Challenge" continued from page 1.

was happy because this was what I
expected, what I thought I had been sent
for. Then the surprise came. I was asked
to take on the managerial position of
"asistente." The job demanded changes
in my routine, including reassignment to
another district of the city. I was now in
a middle class neighborhood where
many services were already available,
and I would be doing administrative
work. I had come to Mexico to work
with the poor, but now I was spending
much of my time typing numbers onto
spreadsheets, waiting in line at the bank
or speaking to wealthy benefactors at
fundraising events. Disappointedly, I
looked at the concrete homes in the
neighborhood to which I had been
reassigned and hastily decided that I had
nothing to contribute there. This was
simply not what I had expected of my
volunteer experience.

Once I began to befriend the teens
who lived there, I realized that they
actually did have many needs and that I
had something very important to offer
them. Although their material poverty
did not seem as great, here drug addic-
tion and gang membership were much
more prevalent. I became very involved
in forming a youth group and coordinat-
ing activities to give teens alternatives to
getting high or fighting with rival gangs.
As our mutual trust and affection grew, I
was able to set high expectations for the
teens, thus helping them to grow in self-
confidence and to boldly pursue lofty
goals. Although I was now working in a
more urbanized neighborhood with
paved streets and electricity, I learned
that poverty exists in many forms and I
grew tremendously by learning to
educate, encourage and love these young
people. I also began to appreciate the
important impact of my managerial tasks
as asistente.

Prior to arriving in Tijuana, I had
many expectations about the volunteer
community with which I would be
living. I imagined that we would all
become like brothers and sisters, that we
would share the same motivations, that
we would support one another spiritually
and that we would all place great value
on community activities. To my dismay,
there were personality conflicts and

varying levels of commitment to the
group. For some, the well-being of the
community was the first priority and for
others, their work always came first. As
a result, conflicts arose when some
members of the community did not show
for community meetings or missed
prayer on a regular basis. Some argued
that communal prayer was unnecessary
because "our work is our prayer."
Others, on the other hand, were frus-
trated by the lack of spiritual support. I
found it hard to accept these different
opinions on community life and spiritu-
ality.

Eventually, I learned that we
needed to listen to one another and to
accept that each of us had differing
expectations of the community. We also
had to be willing to make compro-
mises... to express our feelings and
desires, but to respect our diverse
background, cultures and personalities.
We had to be willing to go along with
the decision of the group, even when it
was not exactly what we wanted to do.
Despite our differences, we all became
very close and two years later, I still
consider my fellow volunteers to be
some of my very closest friends.

Although we all come with
expectations of our volunteer experi-
ence, I believe that the key characteristic
of a happy volunteer is flexibility. I
went to Tijuana with the plan of helping
others to grow and to learn. I'm not sure
who learned more, they or I. Obviously
I learned about the culture and the
language, but I also learned much more.
I gained confidence in my own abilities;
I became more outgoing; I deepened my
faith by working to try to integrate it
more fully into my life; I learned more
about people and I learned about my
vocation. Never before had I driven a
truck, done accounting, directed a choir,
acted as principal of a summer school,
helped write a very large formal grant
proposal, or danced Mexican polkas!
One arrives knowing how to do ten tasks
and is asked to do one hundred. By
allowing myself the flexibility to adapt
to changing situations which were
beyond my initial expectations, I was
able to live two joyful and fulfilling
years and to accomplish things which I
never imagined possible. †

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Discussion questions on expectations based on Linda Dworak's article:

1. In orientation, you most likely identified your expectations about the work you would be doing. Now that you've been serving, in what way is your job meeting those expectations?

2. To what extent will your job allow you to make the impact you expected to make?

3. What expectations about your work may you need to modify in order to realize and better appreciate your impact on the people you serve? _____

4. Linda anticipated that the volunteers she lived with would all seek the same things from community living. To her surprise, her fellow community members had different needs and ideas about community life. What surprises have you encountered in your community? _____

5. What are some things your community can do so that each of the volunteers feels more at home living in community? _____

Discussion Questions based on Ed Phillips' article.

6. Many new volunteers discover as Ed Phillips did that the people they serve see them as **what** they are, rather than **who** they are. Put yourself in the shoes of those you serve. Why do you think it is easier for some of them to see you as a "what" rather than a "who?"

7. What can you do to encourage people to get to know you for **who** you are? _____

8. Ed speaks about bridging the two worlds between volunteers and the people they serve. What gaps need bridging in your own situation? _____

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS:

Many new volunteers expect to move into a community with a group of like-minded fellow volunteers, who all look for the same things from community life. After a month or so of being together, they begin to discover a diversity in the group, varying habits, opinions, and personalities. Use the exercise below to have some fun, make some discoveries, and find out how well you know one another.

Below are 20 pairs of statements. Each statement begins with, "I usually..."

STEP 1: *Working individually, put a check mark next to the statement in each pair that best describes you. Some will be harder to decide between than others. Pick a preference.*

I usually...

Am on time.
 Have a tendency to be late.

Prefer to rent a movie and watch at home with friends.
 Prefer to go out to the theater with friends.

Prefer to grab a bite to eat on the run.
 Like to sit down to dinner and conversation with others.

Like to tell stories.
 Prefer to listen to stories.

Prefer to sleep in on Saturdays.
 Prefer to wake up early and catch the day.

Tell someone I hardly know if they have a piece of food stuck on their chin.
 Can't bring myself to tell them.

Keep a journal as a main source for reflection.
 Prefer to reflect on experiences with friends.

Sit down and write long, newsy letters.
 Make a phone call and spend time catching up.

Have trouble saying "no" when something is asked of me.
 Set limits and can say "no" when I need to.

Feel comfortable letting my bedroom get messy.
 Like to keep my bedroom neat and picked up.

Enjoy praying with others.
 Prefer to pray alone.

Prefer to plan out and take time shopping.
 Prefer to shop quickly.

Prefer to have my free time or weekend planned out ahead of time.
 Prefer to go with the flow, see what comes up.

Listen to the same music I've had for years.
 Like to listen to new artists.

Walk three blocks to pick up a few items.
 Drive there if a car is available.

Have positive and hopeful feelings when I think of the Church.
 Have trouble feeling positive and hopeful when I think of the Church.

Prefer to play a board game I know well.
 Like to learn a new one.

Have no trouble asking someone to turn down music if I'm trying to sleep.
 Would rather try to sleep with the music on.

Plan in advance my clothes for the next day.
 Throw on what ever is available that morning.

Prefer to eat chocolate chip cookie dough raw.
 Prefer to wait for cooked chocolate chip cookies.

STEP 2: *Now let's find out how well your fellow community members know you. Out of the above 20 you just answered, pick five. Come together as a group and ask each of your fellow volunteers how they thought you answered those five. Everyone takes a turn in the spotlight with their five. (Do five more if time allows.)*

***** BONUS QUESTION *****
FOR DISCUSSION WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

Now that you've been together for a while, how is your community realizing your expectations in the following areas:

- Prayer
- Sharing household responsibilities
- Socializing together
- Giving/receiving mutual support

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Volume 3, Number 4

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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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