

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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Staying Connected To A Meaningful Life

The SURVEY SAYS.....

In December we sent a survey on the meaning of life to 700 former volunteers. The responses we got back were enthusiastic. 230 formers took the time to take our survey and answer questions such as, *What defines meaning in your life?* and *What influences affected your decision making before and after volunteering?* You can find the survey on our website at: www.pallotticenter.org/meaningfullifesurvey.asp

You will notice this issue begins our reflections on meaning at the very core. How do we define meaning in our lives and where do those definitions come from? This is a hot topic and we guarantee lots of questions, comments and some truly thought provoking reflection.

Here we present to you some of the results from our survey (not all results of the entire survey are presented in this issue) including a few of the most salient comments made by former volunteers and some unscientific assumptions.

Relevant Findings (See tables)

☘ Former volunteers find meaning mostly in their spirituality, relationships and family. Accomplishments came last.

☘ Those with a "very meaningful life" were more likely to list spirituality as a source of meaning than those with a "somewhat meaningful life."

☘ A need to help others, a desire for social justice and personal dreams were more influential after volunteer service than before volunteering. Former volunteers were also less likely to be influenced by friends after volunteering.

Where do formers say they find meaning?

	Very Meaningful Life (123 out of total 230)	Somewhat Meaningful Life (81 out of total 230)
Spirituality	80%	53%
Relationships	79%	80%
Family	61%	64%
Community	51%	37%
Work	40%	35%
Self Knowledge	31%	43%
Dreams	24%	26%
Accomplishments	24%	20%

11% of the respondents said they had *Very Little Meaning* in their lives and 1% said they had *No Meaning At All*.

Divided between formers who claim to have a Very Meaningful Life or a Somewhat Meaningful Life.

What did formers say were the primary influences in making life choices before and after volunteering? (Out of 230 total responses)

Influences	Before	After
Help Others	63%	69%
Social Justice	37%	56%
Dreams	49%	43%
Educational background	39%	20%
Family	30%	23%
Friends	20%	0%
Financial Security	15%	8%
Career Track	15%	9%

Comments By Former Volunteers On The Meaning of Life:

☘ "Society today puts a great deal of pressure on us to conform but yet we are inspired by personal triumphs and going after our dreams."

☘ "I'd like to know what people did when they pursued a meaningful life, succeeded and then found that it wasn't what they wanted after all. What then?"

☘ "It's an important distinction to make: 'discovering meaning in your life vs. creating meaning in your life.'"

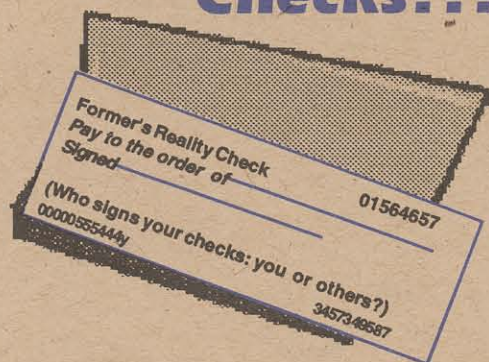
☘ "Pursuit of a meaningful life' sounds so selfish to me for some reason. It seems so far away from living our life as God's children. Probably this is just the semantics of it and what I have heard those words associated with before."

What Can Formers Do With This Information?

Let's start at the beginning. Do you know where you get your definition of meaning? Easy to answer when it's a scroll down box of choices, tougher to understand when you think of your past and the road you have traveled. We think it's important to possess a solid knowledge of how you have come to find meaning in your life. How much influence have external factors had on your definition of meaning and how that definition plays itself out in our lives? Understanding where our concepts of meaning come from can help us clarify whether we can truly claim those concepts as our own. In other words, how much of the way meaning plays itself out in our life is a product of external factors and how much comes from within? Once we have a better understanding of where we stand we'll be more equipped to deal with the other implications for our lives as well as our mental and spiritual well being. Inside you will find exercises and reflections to help you along the way.

A REALITY CHECK Exercise

Who's Signing MY Checks????



Step #1
Start here



Here's a REALITY CHECK tool for you:
Where's my motivation really coming from?
Everybody wears many hats. We juggle our professional, social and personal responsibilities, all the while making sure we are nurturing our relationships with our friends, co-workers, parents and God. Do you ever hear an inner voice asking yourself: Why did I say or do that? Am I simply trying to please my boss, mom, dad, friend, significant other? Or, are my actions chosen from within myself, driven by my own convictions?

Here are some questions to help you sort out the source of your motivations. Circle the answer that's closest to being true for you.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I often worry about what others are expecting of me.	1	2	3	4
I'm in my current field of work mainly because others have pushed me in this direction.	1	2	3	4
I have a hard time making decisions without the encouragement of others.	1	2	3	4
I do my best to follow and conform to the various trends of my peers.	1	2	3	4
I like doing what my bosses tell me to do because then I don't have to think about it.	1	2	3	4
I enjoy the approval/praise of others but am motivated primarily from within myself.	4	3	2	1
I listen to others' opinions but then typically make my own decisions.	4	3	2	1
It is important for me to work in a field I love.	4	3	2	1
I am comfortable having a unique point of view with regard to world issues.	4	3	2	1
I actively seek out points of view that are different from my own. It helps me learn.	4	3	2	1

Step #2: Answer Key

Add up the numbers you have circled to get a score. Be sure you were aware we reversed the scores half way through the list of questions. A high score, closer to 40 suggests you tend to be motivated by your 'authentic self'. A low score, closer to 10 suggests you are motivated by a 'fictional self' which originates in other people rather than from within yourself.

Step #3: Reflecting On Your Answers

What implications for meaning in your life does such a quiz reveal? Take a minute to think about the consequences that living a life for others has on what you value and invest your time and energy in. Do you find most of your meaning in relationships because you need approval? Are you so focused on career success because your parents drilled it into you that you had to be that way to get attention and love? Think about it. Each of you will have different scores, pasts, reasons etc. Some of you may very well be balanced in any case! The important thing is to at least be aware of some of the constructs inside of you that make you who you are and influence what you value.

So, is this where you want to be? Are you happy with what you have understood about yourself, and where your life is going, or afraid that the meaning in your life inappropriately comes from somewhere outside of your true self? The time you spend today reflecting on this is less time wasted later in endeavors, relationships etc. that were pursued for less than authentic reasons.

~ Spirituality ~

THE SEARCH FOR THE DISCOVERY OF GOD'S
TRANSFORMING PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES

Meaning and Spirituality: An Awesome Adventure

Of the 230 former volunteers who responded to our December survey about ways their lives were meaningful, a slight majority (53%) felt their lives were "very" meaningful and a third (35%) said it was "somewhat" meaningful. Of the "very" group of formers, four out of five cited "spirituality" (80%) and "relationships" (79%) as their top sources of meaning. For the "somewhat" group, the majority (80%) also cited "relationships" as their top source of meaning, and half (53%) cited "spirituality" as a key source of meaning.



So, clearly, "spirituality" and "relationships" are central sources of meaning for the formers who responded to the survey. Let's consider some ways spirituality might bring former volunteers meaning by beginning with an overview of how faith works in the majority of people's lives

A century ago, psychologist William James wrote *Varieties of Religious Experience* which argued that although religion held different meanings for different people, it ought to be rooted in something more than emotion. Half a century later, Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport named a key difference among people, whether people said their religious motivation came from inside themselves (intrinsic orientation) or from outside themselves (extrinsic orientation). The former were like salmon who believed in their own internal criteria. They were strong enough to go against the tide if need be and knew where they were headed in life. In contrast, the latter were like jelly fish who lacked internal motivation. They had a tendency toward conformism and acted not out of personal conviction but mainly to please others outside themselves. Hence they were 'extrinsically' orientated.

Today, psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw (*Self Matters*) has popularized a similar distinction using the terms 'authentic' self and 'fictional' self (see *Staying Connected*, p.2). Many Oprah Winfrey viewers have found the distinction very practical. Dr. Phil helps people with their personal archeology as they dig into their past to discover when, as children, they may have gone astray, stopped listening to their inner voice and began conforming to someone else's dream for them.

Are these intrinsic/extrinsic and authentic/fictional distinctions religious or simply psychological? Several gospel stories suggest they are religious. For example, the most central theme of Jesus' teaching was 'the Kingdom of God.' By talking about the Kingdom being *within you*, Jesus suggested it was partly an attitude, a mindset, a way of viewing life. The Gospels' religious Pharisees typically did not have the right mindset (Matt: 7:21-27) but children typically did (Luke 18:16-17). One Scribe, Jesus said, *almost* had it: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Although we here focus on attitude, Jesus makes it clear that authentic spirituality also includes action. That is to say, the kingdom is also outside us, as when the blind see, the lame walk and the naked are clothed (Matt: 11:5-6, 25:32-40). Survey results showed formers appreciated this belief (See the increase in social justice as a primary influence in Table 2 on page one.)

Where does this leave us? It suggests that the role spirituality plays in bringing meaning into our lives is complex. We may feel we are spiritual and that it makes our lives "very" meaningful. Beautiful as this may be, it's also possible that we're overly influenced by religious messages we uncritically absorbed as children. Either way, we have some personal homework to do (conversion) and the "reality check" and readings on page 2 could be a helpful tool and an awesome adventure.

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FORMER VOLUNTEER SIGHTINGS IN
THE...CLEVELAND, CINCINNATI, AND
DAYTON, OHIO AREA.....



Some parishes where "formers" attend:

◆St Patrick's Church, 3602 Bridge Ave. Cleveland, OH
◆Ascension Parish, 14040 Puritas Ave. Tel: (216)-671-5890
Cleveland ◆St. Malachi, 2459 Washington Avenue Cleveland
Tel: (216)-861-5343 www.stmalachi.org ◆Bellarmine Chapel
3800 Victory Parkway Cincinnati www.bellarminechapel.org
"Social Mission Core Team" -Contact: Lauren Renneker (513)
745-3398 ◆University of Dayton, McGinnis Center 9pm Sunday
during the school year. ◆St. Rose of Lima in Western Cleveland
contact Eric Kennerk, (216)-221-3472. ◆St. Ignatius Loyola
Parish, 5222 North Bend Road, Cincinnati, (513)-661-6565

Retreat opportunities & spirituality centers:

◆St. Anns Convent Tel: (859)-441-0679 Cincinnati ◆Milford
Spiritual Center 5361 South Milford Road Milford, Ohio 45150
Tel: (513) 248-3500 milfordspiritualcenter@zoomtown.com
◆Franciscan Development Office 1615 Vine Street Cincinnati
Tel: (513) 721-4700 ◆Jesuit Retreat House Of Cleveland 5629
State Road Cleveland Tel: (440)-884-9300 e-mail:
jrhdeve@worldnet.att.net

◆Sisters Of Charity Spirituality Center 5900 Delhi Road Mt Saint
Joseph Tel: (513)-347-5456 email:

spirituality.center@srcharitycinti.org ◆Saint Therese's Retreat
Center in Columbus, Tel: (614)-866-1611

Social justice organizations and communities:

◆The Center for Social Action UD Campus Ministry
www.udayton.edu/~campmin ◆International Justice and
Peace Center 215 E. 14th Street Cincinnati, Ohio 45210 (513)
579-8547 ◆Archdiocese of Cincinnati Catholic Social Action
100 East Eighth Street Cincinnati (513) 421-3131
www.catholiccincinnati.org ◆St. Ignatius Loyola Parish Peace
and Justice Committee 5222 North Bend Road Cincinnati
(513) 661-6565 ignatius@goodnews.net ◆Dorothy Day
House Xavier University 3800 Victory Pkwy. Cincinnati Tel: 513-
745-3046 ◆St. Francis/St. Joseph Catholic Worker House 1437
Walnut Street Cincinnati Tel: 513-381-4941
◆Archdiocese of Cincinnati Mission Office 100 East Eighth
Street Cincinnati Tel: (513) 421-3131
www.catholiccincinnati.org ◆Catholic Worker St. Herman's
House of Hospitality P.O. Box 6448 4410 Franklin Blvd.
Cleveland Tel: 216-961-3806 ◆Catholic Worker Dorothy Day
House - West 3008 Clinton Avenue Cleveland Tel: 216-771-
0875 ◆Catholic Worker Elizabeth House 1703 West 32nd
Cleveland Tel: 216-241-5207

Groups and clubs:

◆St. Charles Catholic Young Adult Organization
Contact: Sr. Denise Marie Vlna, OSU (440-884-3030). Affiliated
with St. Charles Borromeo Church, Parma Open to young
adults in their 20s and 30s, married, single, widowed and
divorced. Activities: service, spiritual, social (5-10/month).
◆Young Adult Social Christian Organization
Contact: Karl Zahn, President (330-467-7960). Affiliated with SS.
Cosmas and Damian Parish, Twinsburg. Activities: educational,
social, service, spiritual.
◆Good Shepherd Volunteers Thomas J. Allio, Diocesan
Director 1031 Superior Avenue - Room 331, Cleveland, OH
216-696-6525, ext. 3740

*We are grateful to all 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! Click to the formers section
where you can find lists of resources for the entire country,
and add more ideas of your own... anytime!



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Staying Connected is printed on recycled paper. Please do your part by passing on your copy to another former volunteer or by recycling the paper. Thanks!

Hey "Former" ! Think Of Yourself As A Leader?

Consider these quotes and how they might apply to you.

"Giving is the secret elixir that gives life meaning." Anonymous

Personal Reflection #1: Thinking back on ways I gave during my volunteer service, what aspects of my life became more meaningful?

"The final test of a leader is that he or she leaves behind in other people the conviction and the will to carry on." Anonymous

Personal Reflection #2: When I was a volunteer, who did I help by supporting their sense of hope?

"It is not such a fierce thing to lead once you see your leadership as a part of God's overall plan for His world." Calvin Miller

Personal Reflection #3: To what extent do I see myself as a leader? What, if anything, holds me back? Do you feel that God has a plan for you?

"A leader lives with people to know their problems. A leader lives with God in order to solve them." John Maxwell

Personal Reflection #4: With whom am I living? What am I learning?

"If you stop learning today, you stop leading tomorrow." Howard Hendricks

Personal Reflection #5: To what extent am I still learning? How can I be a life-long learner?

"It is not where you are today that counts. It is where you are headed." Anonymous

Personal Reflection #6: Where am I headed with my life? What steps am I taking to get there?

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.