



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 Four, Number Three

In This Issue:

- Are you taking care of yourself? A look at volunteers tending to themselves emotionally, spiritually and physically.
- Exercises and questions for discussion.

It was the People

Joe Sloan, Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Before I left the U.S. for Nicaragua a friend of mine, who had worked in Haiti for a number of years, told me that the hardest part of his time there had been his frequent bouts with one type of illness or another. This was all so new to me; I never actually had to be concerned about staying healthy before. During my orientation at Maryknoll, NY I heard stories of illnesses like malaria and hepatitis and how they effected people. I even went to workshops on how to stay healthy.

You would think that with all that input, I would have stayed healthy. Not so. Living and working in rural Esquipulas, Nicaragua, I soon realized that I was bound to have my share of "sick days." During my first week there, I made hourly trips to the latrine. I am sure my blood type was the favorite food of all the fleas and mosquitos in town. I did my best to stay well. Although I didn't always have much of an appetite, I tried to stay nourished. I had plenty of manual labor to keep me in shape, and I came to accept that sometimes I was just going to get sick.

During that first year, I struggled with the language, the poverty, and the "Christian Martyrdom" tendency of feeling that unless I too was suffering, I was not doing enough for the people. I had my fair share of the blues over this. As sick days or bouts with the blues came along, I would often recall the

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Overview: How are you feeling today? How will you be feeling tomorrow? As volunteers, you might give a different answer to this question every half hour. You don't always know from one moment to the next how you'll feel. Not only can a physical ailment such as a stomach virus sneak up and knock you off your feet, but also the reality of your surroundings, the suffering of those you serve, and tough moments that accompany your job can weigh you down emotionally and spiritually. Whether your ailments are physical, emotional or spiritual, it is important that you tend to yourself.

In this issue we focus on a volunteer's spiritual, emotional and physical well being. Joe Sloan, a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, recounts some discoveries as a foreigner in a country waiting to attack his immune system with "Montezuma's Revenge" and

other illness. As well, Joe relates experiences that helped to heal his emotional slumps, a result of everything from health problems to the impact of the poverty surrounding him. He realized a powerful remedy in those he served. Claire Noonan, a former Apostolic Volunteer, takes us through a daily routine that she found nourished her spiritually. Through community and prayer, Claire was able to process the often overwhelming realities that faced her on a daily basis.

Claire's and Joe's experiences are unique to them. You may or may not see yourself when you read their stories. Our questions and exercises aim to aid you in selecting from their articles ideas that could work for you. More importantly, they will assist you in identifying your needs, be they physical, emotional or spiritual, and coming up with your own ideas for tending to yourself. We encourage you to share your discoveries with your community members, teach and learn from each other, and have some fun.

Learning to 'Process'

Claire Noonan, former Apostolic Volunteer

"Take time to process." As an undergraduate, I used to tease my friends who were social work majors for delivering this admonishment. They seemed to be nothing more than pop psychology's buzzwords. But as an Apostolic Volunteer, I learned the importance of "processing" in order to balance the struggles I experienced in ministry; God and the four women with whom I lived gave me the gift of a strong faith community. It was largely in the sacred space of our shared evening meals and prayer that I was able to sort through all of the thoughts and emotions that witnessing poverty stirred up inside me. Normally, my community of five ate supper

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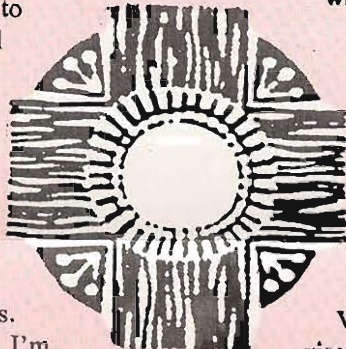
Healing Dreams and Scripture Stories

Ever wake up one morning having remembered a dream but not confident you knew how to interpret it? If so, here's another approach: instead of you interpreting the dream, let the **dream** interpret you, encourage you to find new options and views.

In this second approach, where the dream interprets you, start with the belief that the dream embodies a wisdom your mind and heart are trying to share with you. The psychologist Carl Jung told us dreams are like a valuable letter from our unconscious selves. Clever and insightful as your deeper self is, it would be a shame not to open the letter, to not let the dream "unpack" what's happening in our world.

I dream, for example, I'm driving in a Volkswagon "bug" on top of railroad tracks. Possible interpretation: perhaps I feel I'm being somehow railroaded? If so, are the tracks part of me? Can I decide on a new direction?

What about the scriptures? Same deal: let them interpret you, rather than you always interpreting them. Begin with the faith that the biblical stories have a wisdom that's deeper than initially meets the eye. Claire Noonan, in



"Learning to 'Process'" spoke of allowing herself to be challenged by the gospel. Here for your consideration are some biblical stories that may urge each of us on to better emotional, physical and spiritual health.

Readings from the Masses of:

5th Sunday in Lent - 20 March 1994 - **if the grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruit.** (John 12) Is there a part of your self you are letting go of? Because of your volunteer experiences is there a new part of you that is taking root? A new life?

6th Sunday in Lent - 27 March (Passion of Jesus) **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** (Mark 14 and 15) To what extent is Jesus' story of suffering and resurrection, your personal story as well?

Vigil of Easter Sunday - 2 April - **He has risen...go tell his disciples.** (Mark 16) What are some ways Christ's life is emerging in your life? Are there any "disciples" in your life with whom you can share?

Suggestion for sharing: Meditate on these biblical stories and how they may be interpreting you, urging you to better "health," broadly understood. Share your insights with your friends. What is their vision? Dreams?

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words of an African priest whom I met during my orientation. He said, "If you can't be happy, do not come to my country (any country that receives missionaries); we need people who will bring the good news; we do not need sad people." Eventually, I realized that although I would be ill and/or depressed at times, how long I let it affect me depended on my openness to those who surrounded me. It was the people of Esquipulas who helped to alleviate my ills and to lift my spirits. My mind is filled with examples of their healing powers.

I remember one morning during my first year there having a really tough time getting out of bed. As part of my work with small development projects, I helped plan a trip with a group of campesinos (small farmers). That morning we were scheduled to visit an experimental farm. Things had not been going well with the project at that time, so when I awoke to a rainy, dreary day,

I figured that I would be the only one going on the trip. I got up, and with little motivation, prepared for the trip. When it came time to leave, I was met by about a dozen people waiting to go. Three of them had walked more than two hours in the rain and morning dark to get to the place of departure. Without even realizing it, the campesinos had lifted me out of my gloomy state, energized and restored me.

There was one stretch of time when our house was two weeks without water, three without electricity. As well, our truck had this habit of not starting. After a long day of push starting the truck time and time again, and no hope of a shower or a cold soda in sight, I was feeling pretty depressed. I walked through town consumed by the heat, my own sweat and thirst. I happened to pass by Victoria's home. Victoria was the town beggar. She and her five small and very sickly children lived in a broken down shack about six square feet. When she caught sight of me, she invited me

into her home and offered me a tortilla. Somehow my felt need for a shower and a coke seemed to melt away as I enjoyed Victoria's hospitality.

I could go on with story after story (as I'm sure all of you can) of how our lives were affected and still are affected by the people with whom we live and work. I believe that all suffering is real and painful. We as missionaries will have days when we don't want to get out of bed. But what always helped pull me out of my depression and my own pain was the grace of being witness to those whose crosses are heavier than mine. They have a healing power that needs to be experienced to be truly understood. I guess in part that is why I hope to go back some day. The thought of stumbling out to the latrine with a case of diarrhea on a rainy night, or push starting that truck does not appeal to me; but having the opportunity to be with people, like the campesinos and Victoria, helped to keep my life in a healthy perspective.

together four times a week. Over a good meal, we shared the stories of our day, and stories from our memories. We mingled serious conversation, sometimes debate, with abundant laughter. I found great emotional security in those times together. I returned home from my work each day knowing that I would be fed (or that I would feed the others) and certain that I would be able to talk about events of the day.

I came to the Apostolic Volunteer Program, and to my ministry a little more fragile than I thought I was. So, when I ran into trouble relating to my supervisor, my self-confidence was wounded. I knew that she was unsatisfied with my work, but I couldn't seem to do better. Dealing with feelings of inadequacy stemming from interpersonal relationships was particularly trying in social work because it was coupled with the reality that individually each of us is inadequate to the task of eliminating poverty.

Fortunately, I was able to bring my vulnerability to my community dinner table. The women I lived with affirmed my personhood. They encouraged me by assuring me that my value as a human being resided not in what I did, but who I am. Knowing this, I was able to be myself, uninhibited by the lack of support I felt from my supervisor. My confidence in my own ability to effect change was restored by my

community's life together. Our simple gathering proved to be an incredible source of strength and renewal for me.

Our meal was coupled with prayer. We took turns preparing it, but normally we sang, heard the Gospel of the day, and shared reflections. I can truly say that these moments were sacred. Without prayer I would not have been able to keep myself emotionally fit. It was necessary for me to process my volunteer experience in the light of faith. Essentially my experience at meals and prayer was pure gift of God.

This gift enkindled the fire of my personal prayer. In the quiet moments of the morning, I sat down to be with my God. I used a journal to speak to God, and a quiet heart to listen. In the Scriptures, I found difficult questions and comforting responses. The grace of God sustained my spiritual health by loving me through confrontation with my weaknesses. God transformed pain into growth, doubt into faith.

In the final analysis, I know it was the story of Christ that empowered me to process my experience as a volunteer and thus maintain my emotional and spiritual health. Without the sustenance of Jesus' followers, my community, I would have starved. Without my mornings in the desert, I would have drowned. Without the guidance of the Word, I would have been lost. In the process of responding to the grace of God, the example of Christ, and the presence of the Spirit, I found life and growth and hope.

What Works For You?

Often we need others for support and strength. Claire needed her community; Joe needed the people he served. Although the strength and example of others can be healing, it is important that we recognize our own inner devices for tending to our needs and nurturing ourselves emotionally, spiritually and physically. Use this exercise to look inside and identify what works for you.

Part One: Think of something true to you, something you do to "recharge you battery" emotionally, spiritually or physically. Do you jog to keep in shape? Do you listen to music when you want to think things over? Do you keep a journal for exploring your faith?

Part Two: Come together as a community with the idea of sharing something that works for you. **BUT** instead of simply telling your community members what you do, show them, invite them to give it a try. They might discover something that suits them. Use the fictitious community below as an example of how this exercise could work with you.

Michael: "I usually shoot baskets to unwind at the end of the day. I don't really think about anything. I just shoot baskets and somehow it helps."

Debra: "I find myself in the kitchen (usually baking cookies) when I'm down about work or missing home."

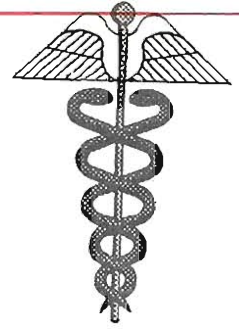
Jeff: "When I was a kid, I used to get finger paints for Christmas. And I still like to move the paint around as I think things over and sort of reflect on what's happening in my life."

Linda: "Since college, I've really been into Yoga. It definitely tones me up physically; but it is also so relaxing and I really feel refreshed after a good session."

So one night everyone shot some baskets with Michael. Linda set up a time for everyone to learn some basics about Yoga. Debra had no trouble getting people motivated to bake some cookies with her another time. And they all made fun of each other's goofy creations with the finger paints.

Who knows what might come of this? The community might wind up taking Yoga together - or they might not. The important thing is they've gotten to know each other that much better; they've shared something personal, and each person has identified something that they do to take care of themselves. See what happens with your community.

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES



1. What differences have you noticed in the way you need to take care of yourself physically since you became a volunteer?

2. Joe Sloan found himself caught up in the "Christian Martyrdom" tendency, the feeling that you're not doing your job unless you're suffering. What can volunteers do to avoid going to that extreme?

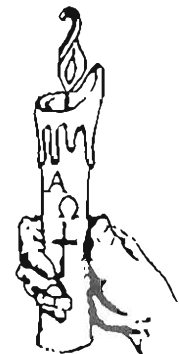
3. Joe discovered that the people of Esquipulas played a role in lifting him emotionally. How do your surroundings (people, environment) affect you?

4. Claire Noonan turned to her community as she processed her experiences. But not every community is like Claire's. Where else can someone turn for support and affirmation?



5. Suppose a community member or client turns to you for help in processing an experience. What skills do you need for this?

6. To what extent do you pray or include God in your volunteer experience? In what ways does that relationship affect your spiritual and emotional well being?



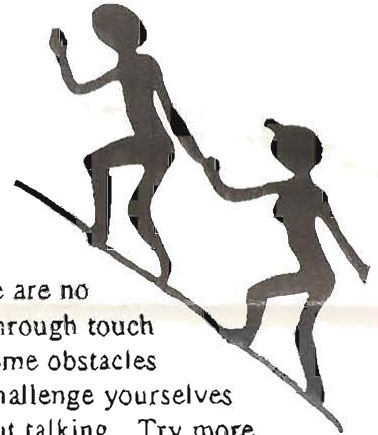
WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Use the following activity as a springboard for discussion with a friend or with the entire community.

Walk of Life:

- What you need:**
1. A bandana or another object that can be tied around your head to cover your eyes.
 2. Groups of two people.

Setting up: Choose a location that offers some open space as well as obstacles, like a local park or your apartment. One person places the blindfold over her/his eyes and ties it securely around the head. Can you see? No? Good; that's the point. If you can see, adjust the blindfold.



To begin: With one partner as a guide, start walking in an area where there are no obstacles. At this time you and your partner can communicate through touch and talking. After a bit, have your partner guide you through some obstacles (over a log or a curb or up some stairs). After a few minutes, challenge yourselves by only talking and not touching. Then try only touching without talking. Try more demanding obstacles (under and over tables, through playground equipment). Always make sure that your partner is spotting and protecting you. If at any time you feel unsafe, stop the activity and talk about what could make you feel safer. Then try it again.

Now switch: Have the guide be guided through the same process.

To end: Discuss the activity. Answer these questions.

When did you feel unsafe? What adjustments did you make and did they work?

When you were blindfolded, what did you do to ensure your own well being?

When you were the guide, what did you do to ensure the well being of your partner? To what extent did you feel responsible to the guidee?

When have you felt physically, emotionally and/or spiritually sapped? Did you make any adjustments in your life?

In your daily living, what do you do to ensure your own well being physically? emotionally? spiritually?

How do you contribute to your community members' well being? To what extent do you play a role in their physical, emotional and spiritual well being? Give an example.

Resolution: First individually, write down your thoughts on these questions: Are you taking care of yourself physically? emotionally? spiritually? What do you need to do in order to maintain your well being in each of those three areas?

Now with your partner or community, either share your thoughts and resolutions or write them on a larger paper and consider what you write to be a commitment to yourself and those around you.

Attention Former Volunteers and Missioners!

The St. Vincent Pallotti Center invites you to become part of our **Network of Former Lay Volunteers and Missioners**. Our purpose for setting up this network is to provide you and other former lay missioners/ volunteers with a pool of returnees who can support one another. Our hope is that through this network, you can lend and obtain assistance in relocating to a new area, be linked to social gatherings, discussion or prayer groups, couples groups, as well as with employment leads and contacts. Here's how it works:

Joining the network: Your former lay program has been contacted and provided with the network form. Ask the program director to send you a copy. This form will supply you with your current information as well as some data on your volunteer/mission experience.

Getting information to you: We will then compile the data and periodically send the director of your former lay program updated lists of network participants. The information will be sorted alphabetically according to state. Your program director will either copy and distribute this data to you or have it on hand when you request specific information about people who are living in your area, working in your field, or share other common threads with you.

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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, and 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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