



# Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers  
presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center ...  
... The people who bring you Connections

© 1996 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

Volume Six, Number Three

## My Own Sense of Community

Allison Cendali  
Catholic Volunteers in Florida

Last September, I began my year of service as a Catholic Volunteer in Florida with all of the enthusiasm and motivation I have ever possessed. Here was an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of other people and to put my faith into practice. I interviewed at two service sites and chose to work in West Palm Beach at a place called Cafe Joshua, which is a reservation restaurant and social service program for the homeless. (I know, many people are reading this saying, "Are you sure there are homeless people in West Palm Beach?" The answer is yes!) I embarked upon this journey with high ideals and with excitement about moving from Washington, DC to Florida.

My first experiences during my volunteer year caused mixed emotions. First of all, the innovative philosophy of the Cafe certainly appealed to me. Homeless men and women who desire to make positive changes in their lives but lack the family and community ties to do so are referred to us by other local social service agencies. Cafe Joshua provides homeless guests with a daily noon-time meal along with assistance in obtaining employment, housing, medical, and legal services. The Cafe is a beautiful new place where guests choose from a menu and the tables are graced with tablecloths, china, silverware, and fresh flowers. Part-time community volunteers wait on tables and serve the guests or simply sit with them sharing the meal and conversation. The point is to build

*continued page 2*

## In This Issue:

What do you do when the going gets tough? How do you handle the challenges you face as a volunteer? And what if you don't live in a typical volunteer community? Where do you turn for support?

In this issue we asked two writers to explore those really difficult aspects of their term of service. It isn't often that we ask people to focus on the negative so much -- but we know that all volunteers face challenges.

Our intention is that in reading Allison Cendali's and Dan McNeil's reflections, you gain insights and new perspectives into your personal challenges as a volunteer.

open to the grace and direction of God, and surrendered myself to be God's servant, despite my expectations to do something more.

Even entering my third year, the role I was to play remained difficult to accept. I was appointed director for the Catholic Charities organization of the diocese after the third director in two years resigned, and a fourth person declined the position. At times the work contradicted my intention to be one with the people, not above them. It seemed strange that I, the visitor, was to decide who was to remain an employee, and who would not.

Surprising to me, even during the times of searching for my role and why I was there, I never lost the feeling that there was where I had to be, to be true to myself. It was in Novosibirsk that God wanted me, at that time, for reasons I still do not know.

A second point of struggle for me was the issue of community life. Again, it was hard to define my role as the only lay man living with two, sometimes three friars. I felt welcome, but there was little support within the community. The friars actually lived apart. Depending on how many there were, one or two lived in the church, and the other shared an apartment with me. There was no community recreation, rarely community prayer, no quality time together, no dialog. We were four people with different nationalities, values, habits, and perspectives on community.

*continued page 3*

## What Role Do I Play?

Dan McNeil  
Franciscan Mission Service

During the first year and a half as a Franciscan lay volunteer to the city of Novosibirsk, Russia, one of the most difficult things for me to understand was what work I was there to do, what role I was to play.

Not being fluent in the language or accustomed to the way things were done, even elementary tasks proved difficult. I found myself best suited for simple jobs, such as working in the warehouse and driving the Catholic Charities' car. Often this did not even go well. Miscommunications were made, resulting in people stranded at the airport and packages delivered to the wrong address. It was difficult to feel affirmed, and I wondered why had I come so far and was struggling so much to do so little.

During this time I tried to understand the spirit of St. Francis and how he would find joy in simple things and in being a "minor" to all. I tried to remain



*"...Community" continued from page 1*

community, to restore dignity to the lives of these broken people, and to encourage the guests on their journey to end their hopelessness. The concept is wonderful, but the reality often falls short of these goals. I found myself questioning the intentions of some of our guests or even the validity of some of their stories. As time progressed, I saw many of these guests, my friends, fall back into the cycle of addiction, return with their children to abusive husbands, hide behind racial remarks, or blame "the system" for all of their tribulations. The enthusiasm and motivation with which I started the year began to fade. I was having a difficult time seeing Christ in some of the people whom I served. I prayed that my own struggles and biases would not deter me from serving to the best of my ability.

Even though I was surrounded by Board members, part-time volunteers, and some guests who wanted to build a

## **"I had to learn to build my own sense of community."**

community, I felt very alone. First of all, I am the only full-time staff person other than the Director. Also, the Catholic Volunteers in Florida do not live in community housing. There are several contacts and CV supporters in the area, but I am the only current volunteer in West Palm Beach. Although I was fortunate enough to find a place to live with an understanding room mate, there are times when he just cannot fathom my role as a lay volunteer. For instance, I was recently confronted and threatened by a guest who accused me of playing a role in the white elitist society that was oppressing him. He screamed, "You don't know what my life is about. You have never had to sleep under a bridge. You have never had to eat out of a garbage can. You could never understand." I told my roommate how much these words hurt me even though they spoke the truth. His reaction was that if I was fearful or unhappy with the job, I should just quit. Normal people don't

stay in jobs where they are not appreciated. It was difficult to explain to him how this is not just employment; it is a calling. I struggled with my faith for so long, and I am now content because I am living it. My work as a volunteer is rewarding despite the stresses I may face. I had to learn to build my own sense of community.

I have learned so much about myself and the effect that my attitude and actions have on other people. I try to offer a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, and a sense of humor to those who need them. There is a beautifully simple picture hanging in the entrance to the Cafe. It reads: "Do not neglect to offer hospital-

ity, for in doing so, some have entertained angels without knowing it." I am reminded of this every time I receive a hug or a small gift of appreciation from

## **"I have learned so much about myself and the effect that my attitude and actions have on other people."**

a guest. The other day, I went on my own time to visit a sick guest. When I arrived at the housing complex where many people in our program live, I was greeted by several children who come to the Cafe with their parents every once in

### **Test Your Resistance to Growth**

*Have some fun with the following exercises.*

*Circle any of the following "Obstacles to Expanding Your Spiritual Resilience."*

I have . . .

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| no time for new stuff               | a sense of being in a spiritual rut |
| a case of mucho Macho               | carpal tunnel syndrome              |
| a sense of machu pichu              | occasional moodiness                |
| a lack of imagination               | feelings of being socially isolated |
| ennui tinged with angst             | little sense of hope                |
| little appreciation of spirituality | little sense of any need for growth |
| burnout from my job                 | myopia                              |

### **Suggested "Scoring"**

- 5 or more circles: Congrats on finishing this inventory! Your personal deck is starting to take shape. Use it as a spiritual guide.
- 3 or 4 circles: You'll do even better by exploring the "What do I need? Where do I need it? How do I get it?" strategy for improving new avenues for your spiritual growth.
- 1 or 2 circles: There are lots of reasons for hope here. Make and share a list of reasons.
- 0 or fewer circles: Your coast is clear for spiritual growth, with no obstacles from the list. Can you think of that are not listed here? Are you happy with the



ut myself  
ude and  
ople."

a while when school is on vacation, the children ran over and hugged me after one of them declared: "There is the lady from Cafe Joshua!" I cannot describe the feeling of joy and satisfaction that I felt just knowing that somehow I had impacted the lives of these children...these angels.

As I begin the second half of my year, I keep this vision clear in my head.

Of course, I know that I will still face many other challenges. I also know that the measure of my life is not what I accumulate or how much I accomplish, but the fact that things here may be a little better because of my presence. +

with

ources" that describes you:

- onomatopoeia
- too little literary/film stimulation
- general sense of fear
- few role models
- few peers
- overwhelming sense of superiority
- ignorance about how to pray

ted against you; consider finding a wise

can I go?" exercise on page 5 to help bolster th.

the spiritual resources you use.

our list on your horizon. Are there some you sources currently at your disposal?

"What Role Do I Play?" continued from page 1

At first, I felt very disappointed, and looked to other people for support and encouragement. But later I realized that regardless of the situation, I still had to do my part to build community. I made an effort to take time to be available, to listen and to start a dialog. Once I prepared a dinner at the apartment for a change of routine from the usual supper at the church. Another time, when a rift was building between the two friars, I invited them both to the apartment to share with each other the views they had shared with me in private. We all were very open about our feelings. I asked one of the friars to read from the Rule of St. Francis. It was the first time I heard it read since my orientation with the Franciscan Mission Service in Washington, DC. It is this day I remember most for being a day of Franciscan community.

At times it seemed awkward, that I as a lay person wanted more from the Franciscan community than they seemed to want themselves. Nor was it always easy to promote community. For my last Christmas, the two friars and I agreed to keep a time open to do something just with each other. I went into the city and looked for things we could do. I found a restaurant, but when the appointed time came for us to go out, one of the friars had to cancel.

Yet, taking time to know the men in brown was an enriching experience for which I feel I am very fortunate. By sticking around to drink a lot of after-dinner hot chocolates I got to know some really good people. From them I learned a lot about the church and still feel today their impact on my spiritual life.

"Being satisfied with time to myself...helped me feel comfortable in living out my mission experience."

Another challenge I faced became accepting my radical change of lifestyle. During my first two years in Novosibirsk, there were no other lay volunteers and the Siberian city had but a miniscule American community. I had a much smaller circle of friends than in the United States, and found fewer forms of entertainment. Without the family presence that I was used to in the States, I often found myself alone. I realized that besides having to relate to people of a different culture, I would also need to better appreciate times spent by myself.

Often the problem could be ignored by working a lot of hours, but that did not always help. I clearly remember one late Friday winter evening making my way to the church to find a possible left-over supper. I was riding a frigid bus with windows frosted white and an inside windchill of -10. I wondered to myself, "What am I doing here? How am I living?" It struck me that my life in Russia was not very fun, nor had I found many occasions to laugh.

It took me a while to adapt to the fact that my lifestyle had changed, and to find joy in things which I could not imagine doing in the States. I began hanging out with the community of Mother Teresa Sisters and enjoyed a lot of walks in the park. On Saturday nights I would attend prayers at the Russian Orthodox church. I acquired a real appreciation for the splendor of their ceremony. I maintained my diary, did a lot of reading, and took up playing the harmonica and ice skating. Being satisfied with time to myself, and trading in some old hobbies for some new helped me feel comfortable in living out my mission experience.

Serving as a Franciscan Lay volunteer in Russia challenged and stretched me in many ways. Struggling through issues relating to work, community, and personal discovery led to a life-fulfilling experience that I treasure today. +



## WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. Throughout his three years, Dan struggled with his "role" as a volunteer and with defining it. Name one or two on-going struggles you have had as a volunteer.

---

---

---

2. During the time that Dan was doing "simple jobs" he tried to understand the spirit of St. Francis by finding joy in simple things. What simple things do you find joy in?

---

---

---

3. Building community became quite a challenge, which Dan embraced by trying different approaches. How can his model inspire you in your own situation?

---

---

---

4. Dan's lifestyle changed significantly. What are some ways you see your lifestyle changing either in your attitude, expectations or activities?

---

---

---

5. Allison's experience of community is different from most volunteers. She had to learn to build her own sense of community. How does her experience compare to your own?

---

---

---

6. Allison mentions several "small gifts of appreciation" that she received. Describe some "gifts of appreciation" given to you.

---

---

---

7. At times Allison found it difficult to see Christ in the clients at Cafe Joshua. Can you identify with this? How so? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

8. How do you spend your alone time?

---

---

---

# What Do I Need? Where Can I Go?

*We all need support. As volunteers and missionaries, we need support and guidance as we deal with being away from home, working in challenging jobs, and living in an environment unlike any other we've experienced. Use this exercise to identify your specific needs for support and where you can receive it.*

Either alone or with your community, brainstorm: What experiences are you struggling with? (loneliness? relationships? poverty around you?) Jot down in this box words or phrases that identify your needs for support.

## Step 1: What Issues are you Dealing With?

## Step 2: Where Do You Go?

In each of the boxes below, identify one source for support you use now (e.g., friend, co-worker, God). Write down what makes each a valuable support for you.

---

---

## Step 3: Where Can You Go?

Think for a bit...What sources are out there for you that you are not turning to? Are you listening for God's voice in this situation? Are you keeping a personal journal? Are you relying on your friendships? Challenge yourself and seek out an untapped source for support. Use the lines below to write out a personal statement, a commitment to yourself to take action. Who or what will it be?

---

---

---

---

## Alone Time?

**Do you sometimes feel the need to have time to yourself?  
Do you allow time for personal reflection?**

*Take some time in the evening, before you go to bed, to reflect back on your day, to see how God is working in your life. Spend as much, or as little time on each question as you would like. You might want to write your thoughts down in a journal.*

What am I thankful for today?  
What am I struggling with/questioning?  
With whom did I interact today?  
Who did I avoid?  
When and where did I feel/see God's presence?  
Where do I think God is leading me?  
What areas of my life need attention?

## Shared Visions

*A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center*

©1996 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

Volume 6, Number 3

**Editor:** Andrew Thompson · **Production Editor:** Susan Marble Cuthbert

**Advisors:** Rev. Frank Donio, S.A.C., Susie Mullaney, Rev. Bob Kinast, Bill Lowell, Sr. Anita Joseph Reeves and Pallotti Center Directors: Wendy Borchers, Sal Tollis, Patrick Marcham, Joan Smith, and Betty Wallin.

©The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

These materials are copyrighted. Unauthorized reproduction is prohibited. The Pallotti Center hereby gives permission to reproduce all or any of the contents of this publication so long as proper credit is given to the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center and so long as reproduced materials are distributed gratis.

### **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, Saint Louis and Sacramento. 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.*



**The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center  
for Apostolic Development**  
Box 893-Cardinal Station  
Washington, DC 20064  
(202) 529-3330

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
WASHINGTON, DC  
PERMIT NO. 3188