



# 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

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Volume Six, Number Four

## RETURNING AND FORMER VOLUNTEERS!!

### THIS ISSUE IS FOR YOU!

Whether you are just completing your term of service or you've been a former volunteer for a few years, there is something here for you. Because the two articles are filled with insights and advice from two former volunteers, the discussion and reflection questions, the community exercise and the resources provided, this issue of *Shared Visions* is definitely one to hang onto!

As always, we welcome your comments and suggestions. Please write or e-mail us anytime! (E-mail: Pallotti01@aol.com). Visit our homepage too! <http://www.cua.edu/www/rel/pallotti>

## Keeping the Spirit Alive

Sharon Waters

Former Vincentian Volunteer

It is three years after your year of service. You now have a generally nine-to-five job, your former roommates are scattered across the U.S., and your last spiritual activity outside of Sunday Mass was the closing ceremony for your volunteer year. Being so occupationally, spiritually and physically removed from your volunteer year makes it challenging to retain the enthusiasm and idealism that you felt during your volunteer year. But with effort and a little creativity, it is possible to keep that spirit alive.

### ~ Occupational Connection ~

I consider myself lucky to be currently in a job which focuses on volunteer service. However, my involvement is on an administrative level, so I am removed from any

direct service. So what can you do if your job is completely removed from your year of service?

One solution is to perform direct service outside of work. However, the struggle becomes finding the time to do it. Everybody is busy, and when one factors in all that one wants to accomplish between 5 p.m. (or later, depending on overtime) and 10 or 11 p.m., it is difficult to find time to commit one night a week to service. Currently, I spend one or two nights a week volunteering with a political organization. Although I have committed to one night each week, I selected this type of service partly because it is flexible enough to allow me to skip a week when necessary if I am traveling for work or have another commitment. Although I often wonder if I could do more good tutoring, working in a soup kitchen, or visiting the elderly, I know that without the flexibility this organization offers I would probably end up "never getting around" to doing any type of volunteer work. In addition, for now I believe that I can accomplish a different sort of change through this organization which can also have positive effects.

*continued page 2*

## Ruined For Life?

Mark Hanafee

Former Christian Foundation for Children & Aging volunteer

The Jesuit Volunteer Corps has a slogan that goes something like this: "become a JVC and be ruined for life." That word "ruined" understandably scares people a bit and makes them apprehensive about what happens during and after their volunteer year. I've been a JVC: Chicago Support Person for the past three years, and as each year of volunteers has come and left Chicago, we have invariably talked and joked about what that word means for each of them. In this short article, I want to share some of the content of those discussions and some of my experiences as a former volunteer.

From 1988-1990, I served as a volunteer for the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA) in the

Dominican Republic. While the CFCA did not use the term "ruined for life," I quickly realized upon my return to the USA, that the term was applicable to my experience. You see, my volunteer experience was not really over when I returned to the States because I had learned so many new things about myself and had seen the world from a new perspective. Now I had to return to my "former life" and share my experience with my colleagues, family and all the friends, old and new, to whom I was returning.

To set the record straight, actually, I was not "ruined" at all; I was changed for the better because I was touched by the poor people with whom I worked as a volunteer. As volunteers, we are all touched by the poor in different ways;

*continued page 3*

Perhaps another solution is that you can contribute to your volunteer program and site financially. The biggest change in my occupation from my volunteer year, of course, is the size of my paycheck. While I can no longer give 40 hours a week to my volunteer program, I am glad that I now have an ability to support the program in a financial capacity. Although I am no Bill Gates or Donald Trump, I give what I can.

The Federal Government, for which I work, has a Combined Fundraising Campaign which has a 109 PAGE booklet of nonprofit organizations to which I could donate. The number of choices is overwhelming! Luckily for me, I have already seen firsthand the work accomplished by my volunteer program and site and can feel completely confident knowing that I am making an excellent choice by donating money to them.

### *~ Spiritual Connection ~*

At my volunteer site, Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, we began each day with an opening prayer, which is something that is definitely not done at the Federal agency where I work. I also no longer have 3 religious sisters as co-workers, and the last time I went on a spiritual retreat was during my service year.

However, the one thing which did carry over spiritually from my volunteer year is speaking during masses. At Catholic Network, part of my duties included giving mission appeals where one speaks during the Mass, usually in place of the homily, in an effort to raise funds and awareness about one's organization. I can still remember when I gave my first mission appeal. I seated myself in the first row while the church was fairly empty. When it was my turn to speak and I walked up onto the altar and turned to see that the church was now full, I almost fainted on the spot. (My fear of public speaking only narrowly beat out my fear that my appeal would raise only 85 cents!)

Nevertheless, mission appeals always brought me a big confidence boost when after the Mass, strangers would approach me and comment positively on my year of service. Now, my spiritual connection involves serving as a lector at my church. Granted, the words I now speak were written by someone else and no one ever comes up to me after mass to tell me how they enjoyed my reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. However, I enjoy being involved with my church and, through my involvement, being able to meet others who share my spirituality.

### *~ Physical & Emotional Connection ~*

Now that I am no longer physically located at my work site or living with my volunteer roommates, my physical connection has been replaced with an emotional connection. And how could I ever be emotionally removed from my volunteer year? The year for me was one of the most exciting, challenging, eye-opening and worthwhile of my life! And it is probably this aspect of the year more than any other which makes me want to keep the spirit of my volunteer year alive. For this reason, I find this connection the strongest and easiest to maintain.

In fact, it sometimes seems that being removed and looking back on the year may in some ways be a help and not a hindrance. Three years later, it is easier to gloss over the downturns and difficulties of the year and see it more "through rose-colored glasses." Three years later, the monthly stipend doesn't seem as small, our weekly house meetings don't seem as petty, the wait for the phone shared by seven people doesn't seem as long, the pasta dinners don't seem as frequent and my roommate John's cooking almost seems edible...well, okay, it may be a few more years before I can fully reach that delusion!

The emotional connection is maintained because my roommates and friends from my year of service understand a component of my make-up and personality that even the three best friends I have had since fifth grade can never know. And for that reason, it's my volunteer roommate, Amy, who I first call up during a job search and say, "So, can you see me in this job?" Or it is a phone call to another community member, John, to ask: "You know what I'm like to live with. Could you see me living with so-and-so?"

All my six former roommates now live more than five hours away from me and our former home city. However, I am fortunate to still be in the same city where I can still maintain contact with my volunteer site and I know other former volunteers with whom I can maintain a friendship. And as for keeping in touch with my former roommates, thank God for the telephone...and the fact that I no longer have six other people to share it with! +

*Margaret Koach recently returned to the Center and a group of returned volunteers. Sharing her own memories of her experiences in South America, her time in town Detroit, Margaret wrote the following below containing her memories of the springtime or youth*

#### Impressions of My Year

Springtime, unlit  
Exploration, adventure  
Barquisimeto, Venezuela,  
Dirt floor tin roof shanty  
Open my world, see a new world

Springtime, unlit  
Volunteer buried under shack  
I am useful, working so hard,  
eager to please, and easy

Mabuhay, Welcome  
Banana trees, more  
Magna banca boa floating  
Open my world, see a new world

Cambodia, L  
War tore through their lives  
Seeking refuge they  
Open to my world, see my world

Springtime, unlit  
Swing low sweet ch  
To a different world  
Fisher building,  
Chrysler building  
Depressed and  
Exploited rich and  
Open my world, see one world

*"Ruined For Life?" continued from page 1*

the one common experience is that once you are touched, you remember it because there is something passionate about the encounter. At some point we feel overwhelmed by the encounter and this helps us to relate with the experience of being poor. It is an encounter which makes us feel more human, feel like we are more fully alive. I, for example, was somehow surprised by the realization that my "poor"

friends were happy and knew how to enjoy life and celebrate at least as well, if not better, than I, a person who has never experienced real hunger for food. Somehow, this seemed like a contradiction to me because I had a "solid" family, a "solid" education and shouldn't this help me to be more "fully alive" than the poor? The answer to that question may seem obvious to you and me now, but at the time I was startled by this new understanding. It still affects me with my decisions today and will continue to affect me for the rest of my life.

Yes, my experience changed me for the better. But upon my return, as with most changes in life, there were some growing pains. This was and continues to be difficult at times, because I feel a certain solitude because I have some difficulty articulating the importance "the poor" have for me and sharing that experience with others. Two years ago, three other men and I moved into an apartment and formed an intentional community. Living in this community has definitely been a blessing for me. Moving into community meant that I was making a commitment to spend time working on my spiritual life and trying to integrate it into my daily work life and social life. It so happened that

all four of us were former volunteers with various agencies around the country and the world. Our experiences with the poor, the marginalized have shaped and influenced how we relate with each other and with others.

Last autumn I participated in a panel discussion of the Catholic Network of Volunteer Service (CNVS) conference held in Chicago and, at one point, I half jokingly shared, "My volunteer years definitely ruined me for life, so I'm

naturally happy to serve as a JVC Support Person to ruin others so that I have some companions along the journey!" Actually, I feel like my volunteer years changed me and helped me to take risks, to experience feelings more deeply, to question why I have certain beliefs. Being able to willingly take risks, to experience these feelings, to question, is a freeing experience. But making these steps is not always easy. We need companions. Fortunately, I have found people who have helped me and in turn, I am happy to be of support to others who may need some companionship.

After we return from our volunteer year(s), it helps to have contact with others who have had some kind of similar experience. I strongly suggest that you have contact with your volunteer agency to inquire about what resources they have in terms of reunions with other former volunteers and possible retreat weekends. It is very important to have this time to process the ways that we have changed and to figure out how we want to use what we have learned in our lives as former volunteers.

In Chicago, I have been involved with a great network of former volunteers. More than anything else, this is a social network that puts us into contact with others who have had some similar experiences in the past. This former volunteer network gets together for a potluck dinner about 6-8 times a year and after we eat, there is a usually some kind of reflection/prayer question that we are invited to think about and share. Many times good conversations result about topics that we normally might not discuss in the course of our daily life. For many of us, it is a refreshing time where we can continue to reflect on the ways we have been enriched by our volunteer experience.

I think that the biggest challenge that we have as former volunteers is to find ways to stay connected with our volunteer experience. In my opinion it is not healthy to ignore the experience that we have had and the impact that it has on our lives now and in the future. It may take a few years to figure out exactly how we want to integrate our experience into our current lives, but it is well worth the effort that it takes. The good news is that as time goes on, our volunteer agencies are becoming better able to help us figure out ways to get connected with others and find ways to process our experiences as former volunteers. Don't hesitate to be in contact with them to tell them what you need! +

## Looking for a job?

The Pallotti Center has a **Job Bank** for former volunteers. Contact us for more information.

Susie Mullaney  
Volunteer Contact  
Pallotti Center

P.O. Box 893-Cardinal Station  
Washington, DC 20064  
(202) 529-3330 e-mail:Pallotti01@aol.com

## WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. By volunteering on the local level, Sharon can remain involved in service. How important to you is staying connected with service work as a former volunteer? How do you see yourself fulfilling this desire?

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2. What spiritual elements of your service year(s) do you continue (or plan to) nurture in your post volunteer years?

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3. In what ways can you (or do you) stay connected to the people you served and those you served with as a volunteer? How does staying connected to people express the spirit of gospel living?

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4. Mark said he was challenged by the people he served to be more "fully alive." Describe some times when you have felt more fully alive. Does this remind you of similar stories in the scriptures?

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5. Name two or three ways your volunteer year(s) "ruined" you or changed your perspective of the world. What have you discovered about yourself?

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6. As Mark says, "We need companions." His living in an intentional community and involvement with a network of former volunteers is a strong source of support for him. In what ways do you receive or seek such support for yourself?

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7. In what ways would you like to see your former volunteer program supporting and assisting you?

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# Let's Hand it to Your Community!!

On a very large piece of paper or newsprint, trace one hand of each person living in your community. Now draw or attach symbols or words that represent you as a community -- what you've accomplished, what you've experienced together, your highs and lows, and specific individual contributions to who you are as a whole. Keep the paper hanging up and continue to add to it as long as you're together. If you're moving on, leave this behind for the next community to come. Let it show them what you're about. Perhaps you could take a copy of the newsprint with you as a reminder of your volunteer service and add to it as you move into new occupations and challenges.



# Returning Volunteers . . . Take Advantage of Our Services!

As you begin to look forward and ask yourself, "What Next?" remember the free resources and services the Pallotti Center offers you . . . .

**The "What's Next?" Notebook:** Ask your program director for a copy. This notebook is designed to help you think through the decisions ahead and figure out how to incorporate your volunteer experience into whatever comes next. This notebook can point you toward several resources available to you at this leg of your journey. Also included in the notebook is information about the **Pallotti Center Job Bank**. Through this job bank, you can receive monthly employment listings from the Church and non-profit sectors. Your program director should have copies of the notebook. Ask for one!

**Network of Former Lay Volunteers and Missioners:** Through this network, you can be in contact with former volunteers from every program out there. Ask your program director for a network form!

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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, St. 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.*



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**Attention Former Volunteers!!**  
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