



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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Touched by God, Even in Pain

Liz Mach

Maryknoll Lay Volunteer

It happened within a split second. We were driving the dirt road between Southern Sudan and the northwest corner of Kenya when we came over a rise in the road. There was a truck carrying relief goods of food and living supplies off the road in the trees, with broken glass shining in the dirt. The beginning of a seemingly unending volley of gunshots carried us down the road as twelve men opened fire at the truck in which we were riding. During that split second, the windshield exploded and bullets were flying through the truck, bouncing off the dashboard settling into the back of the passenger seat where I was sitting.

I think we always knew theoretically that an ambush was a possibility. Would it ever happen to one of us? People tend to think they are invulnerable to such an action.

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• **Volunteers Dealing with Violence:**

Liz Mach shares her personal experience in S. Sudan and John Wiley discusses his witness of violence among the people he is serving in West Virginia.

• **Spirituality of Reconciliation:**

Spirituality transforms violence into healing through reconciliation.

• **Let's Develop a Safety Plan:**

Questions for you and your community to go through in order to be more aware of your surroundings and the ways you deal with stress.

**IT'S NOT BEING PARANOID...
IT'S BEING PREPARED!**

That hot, dusty day in S. Sudan I realized that I was very fragile and vulnerable.

Of the four people in our truck, I was the only one injured. I left the ambush wounded, in both my knee and chest, by shrapnel from bits of the truck fragmented by the bullets. I also walked

away in disbelief that we were all alive. Of the two other trucks hit that afternoon, at least 4 people were killed. We all ended up that evening in the triage of the International Committee of the Red Cross Hospital which was there to receive war wounded from the ongoing conflict in S. Sudan. We made strange bedfellows. The thirty beds in triage were filled with soldiers wounded in the war, and in the bed next to me was a young boy hurt in the same ambush.

A split second on a dusty road connected me with the mass of suffering people in S. Sudan in a way that I will never forget. I was just as vulnerable as they were: race, gender, or age made no difference to a bullet. Being there as a missionary who was trying to be of service made no difference to those shooting the guns. The heart thumping terror was reality.

What I did begin to understand was the meaning of the phrase in Swahili: Mungu Yupo (God is

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Standing in the Shadows of Christ

By John Wiley

Passionist Volunteers-East

Nature's beauty is alive and well among the peaks of West Virginia's mountain tops. Days begin with the softest touch of morning rays that glimmer across a field of fresh dew, exposing the gems that had gathered overnight. This gently blends with the song of the birds as they busy themselves with their outdoor activities, creating a peaceful ambiance that whispers "Almost Heaven." Sadly, this is not so much true for those who wake, not to the beauty of nature's best, but to the pain and

humiliation of real life -- a life that has reared failure, disappointment and violence from generation to generation.

These heirlooms have beaten expectations so low that learning to read is noted as a remarkable feat. As children, they wake from sleep to the screams and cries of a drunken fight. While fear fills their empty stomachs, they desperately plead to "God Almighty" to make it stop. Continuing criticism from peers and authority figures escorts the youth of Appalachia into adolescence and reassures they will inherit hopelessness. Gravely, these young adults then search for some accommodating element to life.

Fearfully, they will avoid their abusive father to keep from him yet another reminder of his failures and look to their battered mother for advice. Not fully understanding their parents' response of "never have children," the youths are again convicted of this inherited crime. Therefore, delinquency of both social and civil laws, such as police records and early parenthood, are the usual results of these searches. And so, as they look ahead to the future, high school is viewed as another unnecessary humiliation with graduation deemed as pointless.

Questions run through my mind: How can this vicious cycle of

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with us). God was certainly on the journey with us that day. Some saw the face of God as they lost their lives. Others of us saw the face of God in those who accompanied us as we began to deal with the feelings of loss, anger and disbelief that this actually happened. People really did shoot us. For me, God came with the people who focused their love and strength to help me in my healing process.

Three nurses at the hospital stabilized my wounds and let me talk about the horror. Margaret, the Sudanese wife of the driver of our truck, a nurse herself, sat with me the next day while I waited to be air evacuated. We cried and we prayed together throughout that day. The Maryknoll Sisters I had been living with in Nairobi enfolded me in their love the night I returned and made the necessary doctors' appointments to evaluate the wounds. Mark, an Associate in Maryknoll, sat with me for two afternoons sensing that I needed the gentle presence of someone to just *be* with me. Friends they are and always will be because they understood the simple message of the Gospel to be present to those in need.

I went through the many phases that one goes through when confronted with violence. Initially, I denied it all happened and just wanted to go to a house and "wash up." I wanted to be released from the hospital quickly to be able to go and

continue my work in S. Sudan. I felt a numbness when I saw the Sudanese huddled around the truck

carrying the dead. I trembled when Margaret came to visit me in the hospital and just wanted to hold me. I cried when it felt safe to do so. I had to put boundaries on my life for awhile for things like: where I drive, what time of day I drive, what areas of the city I enter into, who I go out at night with and what situations I allow myself to get into alone.

Where is God in all of this? Never before had I faced death so head on and so violently. I thought that God was love, so how did this happen? I was just trying to be of service to people and they hurt me.

God is love. I have never felt this so strongly as I do now. I saw the love of God in all those who reached out to me. I saw the love of God in the young boy from the second truck who lay on the bed next to me in the hospital. I felt the gentle presence of God in the messages I received from around the world.

They were filled with concern and love and helped in my healing process.

But there are still remnants of post-traumatic stress in my life that I am home dealing with now, one and a half years later. I have flashbacks; I have times of high anxiety that I need to work through. Am I angry at those men? I think I wonder more than anything why they would do

something like this. What crazy things have happened in their lives that they don't value a human life? I do think I am angry

**"God is love.
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when I think of the "war games" the world plays without concern for civilians living in the area. And, I pray for those who feel the need to act out the violence and for their victims. Talking it over with God, friends and a therapist have helped me to focus the anger.

The ambush is a reality in my life. It happened. I don't know why, but I do know that I feel closer to God than I ever have in my life. I trust more in God's care for me. Are there more things that God wants from me yet? I like to think so. I have never before in my life been as open and trusting of others. I like to think that once we become so vulnerable — actually cut open and exposed — we have gone over that edge that we pull back from in so many situations. I have been exposed. What happened was real. And God walked with me in a concrete way through Margaret, Mark, Carroll, Nuncia, Ruth and numerous others. I see the face of God each day now as I am touched and loved by so many. I am grateful. +

**"Initially, I denied it all
happened and just wanted to go
to a house and 'wash up.'"**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LIZ'S ARTICLE:

1. Liz wrote that she realized she was just as vulnerable as the suffering people she was serving in Southern Sudan. In what ways do you feel vulnerable in the community in which you serve? What can be done to help you?
2. She also describes seeing the love of God in all those who reached out to her after the traumatic experience. In whom or in what ways have you seen the love of God after having or hearing about a traumatic event?
3. "Remnants of post-traumatic stress" are still visible in Liz's life. She implied this is due in part to her desire to put the violence behind her, not deal with her anger, and perhaps too quickly to get on with service. Who are friends and professionals with whom you would feel comfortable working through your emotional response to violence, trauma or culture shock?

human degradation be stopped? Why is so little being done by the leaders and educators of this area? Do they not see with each turn of the head, they again strike the nails that bind Christ's body to the cross, the same cross before which they pray each Sunday? They must not have much respect for this symbol, to defraud its very existence. After all, did Christ not die on the cross for us, as an example of the greatest sacrifice one could do for another? Which do you feel better serves this honor, on your knees at his feet, or hand in hand at his side?

The frustration and disappointment of all that I see and hear

"The frustration and disappointment of all that I see and hear is so often overwhelming..."

is so often overwhelming, I find it hard at times to stay focused. Sometimes it appears easier to "take on" problems people are having, rather than helping them find their own solutions. To solve their problems for them would serve no one. Detachment is one way I keep this obstacle from interfering or, worse, becoming habitual. Physical isolation, however, is not always enough to settle these emotions.

Spiritual and mental cleansing, for me, is most effective, and can usually be obtained through quiet meditation, musically aided relaxation or journaling. Nevertheless, centering my objectives to produce a clear image,

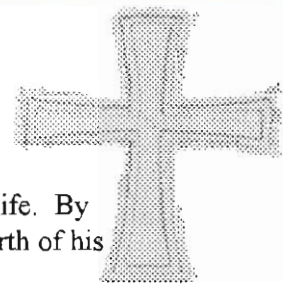
then concentrating on that image sets my mind at a refreshed state.

As a volunteer, a Christian and an American, I have found myself located in an ambiguous land. Traditional values are revered with much pride by most people here in Appalachia, as they are for the rest of our country. Others, seemingly, have been constricted to reenacting the same violent lifestyle that preceeded their own. As I witness the depravity and violence that surrounds me, I willingly offer a friendly smile along with a helping hand to the veterans of these heinous crimes. With the belief that I do what has been asked of me, comfort comes through the realization that I stand in the shadows of Christ.+

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR JOHN'S ARTICLE:

1. John felt challenged not to be overwhelmed, frustrated and disappointed by the cycle of degrading suffering he saw heaped on the youths he served. What sufferings or cycles of violence do you see in the lives of the people you serve? What emotional reactions does this trigger in you?
2. Many volunteers don't experience direct violence to themselves personally, but do see it secondarily in the lives of those they serve. Quiet meditation, journaling and music gave John the distance, cleansing and focus he personally needed to continue serving afresh. What helps you?

***Living Life Passion-ately:
Transforming Violence into Rebirth***



Easter (Jesus' passion, death and resurrection) celebrates the central mystery of the Church's life. By his acceptance of this suffering, Jesus transformed the violence of his crucifixion into the rebirth of his resurrection. Each victim of violence is also called to eventual healing and rebirth.

Consider the following parallels between Jesus' Easter mystery & victims' process of healing:

Jesus' Passion

- Victims' experience with violence and violation
- Feelings of outrage at injustice and the shock of the reality of abuse
- Crushed idealism of one's initial goals that led the person to volunteer

Death

- Temporary loss of personal identity
- Victim acknowledges the event and processes full range of feelings
- Gets the violent event "outside of self;" dies to image of self as invulnerable through debriefing with friends and professionals

Resurrection

- Puts pieces of life back together in order to reach original level of functioning
- Victim makes choices toward growth
- Gradual move toward restoring victims' sense of humanity, now as a new creation; strives to forgive perpetrator

Spirituality in Light of Violence

"Spirituality," how a person lives his or her faith, begins with a view of the world rooted in religious convictions. It helps the individual filter and respond to daily events, including violence.

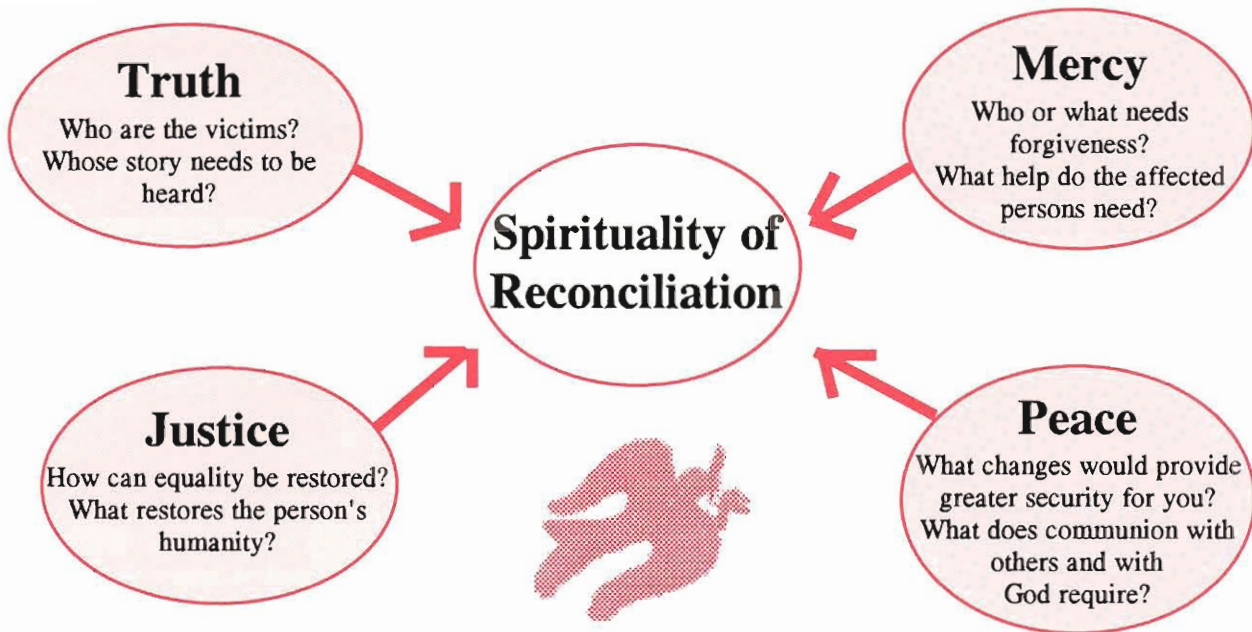
In the spheres below are some questions drawn from scripture, to help a volunteer or a community face violence realistically. Faith nudges us to gradually, even slowly, grow toward the healing forgiveness of reconciliation.

*"Truth and mercy have met together;
peace and justice have kissed."*

(Psalm 85:10)

This psalm tells the story of the conquered Israelites' struggle toward healing; reconciliation is where these 4 values meet.

Directions: Identify an experience of violence you or your community has suffered; discuss it in light of these 4 sets of questions and how they lead to a Spirituality of Reconciliation.



Your experience can benefit the volunteers that come after you!
If you would like more details on how to put together a comprehensive safety plan, please contact us for a free packet that includes resources for:

**Want
More?**

- dealing with violence
- organizations promoting non-violence
- spiritual healing
- an extended bibliography on violence

Please write, call, or e-mail us with your address and we'd love to send you this free packet!
e-mail: Pallotti01@aol.com <http://www.cua.edu/www/rel/pallotti>

Let's Develop A Safety Plan!

It is important to think about safety issues *before* a violent act occurs. Both personal reflection regarding how you react to stressful or violent situations, and also knowing you have a tangible safety plan to follow, can help you to better react if a confrontational situation does occur.

Take time to ask yourself the following questions, and discuss them with your community as well. *Everyone has a different threshold for violence.* It is important to be self aware and self accepting and also to be aware of how your community would need and give support if violence occurs.

PHASE #1: Personal Reflection and Community Sharing

- What kind of violence have you seen or experienced?
- How has your exposure to violence affected you? What emotions has it touched?
- How have you dealt with these feelings? What helped -- what didn't help?

PHASE #3: Personal Violations

What if you experience violence directly to yourself -- robbery, mugging, sexual assault?

- Where is a place you can go to regain a sense of safety?
- Who are support people you would need to call immediately (friends in surrounding community, volunteer program administrators, crisis center/hotline, police, support services in local area, counselor, neighbors, family)?
- What are ways you can document exactly what happened (write every detail of the event, summarize police and medical info)?
- What is your personal style for managing crises (straightforward, over-react, denial, minimize problem, etc.)?
- What practical steps can your community take to create a safer environment and a support network in case a violent act does occur?

PHASE #2: Property Violations

What if you experience violence to your property -- theft of, or damage to personal belongings?

- Who are the support people you would need to call (police, neighbors, insurance, volunteer program administrators)?
- What are the phone numbers you and your community would need to have on hand?
- How do you and your housemates feel about the precautions you now take in your house and in your neighborhood (especially when traveling at night)?
- What changes do you want to make in light of your above answers?

Take your whole community for a walk around the neighborhood!



What's down that street? Have you looked behind that dumpster? Where could you run for help? What paths do you all take to work? Are they well lit? Meet your neighbors. Find out who's around. Who would hear you if you yelled? Do you carry pepper spray? Think about it in terms of knowing your options ahead of time. It's not paranoid to do this; it will give you time to react quickly if you need to. Thinking ahead of time about what you would do makes everybody safer.

A Biblical Reflection: *How did Jesus respond to violence?*

John's gospel tells what happened when Jesus was held prisoner, mocked and beaten by soldiers:

"If there is something wrong in what I said, point it out; but if there is no offense in it, why do you strike me?"

John 18:20-24

Notice: Jesus personally engaged his tormentors: Why are you doing this to me?
He challenged them to question their actions and to be more human.

Contrast Jesus' response in John's gospel with his teaching recorded in Matthew's gospel:

"You have learned how it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I say to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well."

Matthew 5:38-39

1. What is Jesus' approach to peace/violence in each story? You may find it helpful to read their broader contexts: Matthew 5:20-48 and John 18:1-24. What is your personal response to each story?
2. What general stance does today's Christian community take toward responding to violence? Where are you personally with it?
3. Should Christians have one absolute principle for responding to violence, e.g. "always turn the other cheek" or "never go to war?" Or should we adapt depending on who we are dealing with and the potential for getting the other person to change? Is there another guiding principle?

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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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