



# 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 Seven, Number Four

## In this issue: Closure & Goodbyes

- Read how former volunteers *Megeen White* in Zambia and *Joe Kornik* in Chicago dealt with their goodbyes!
- Plus a biblical reflection on Jesus' goodbye and goodbyes that may relate to your own closure experience.
- Did you know that the Pallotti Center provides services for YOU after you leave your placement? Do you need help finding a job? See page 4!
- The Closure Tree...see for yourself, page 5

### *Holding On, Letting Go*

*Megeen White*

*Franciscan Mission Service Volunteer*

In the midst of homework that needed to be graded, fees to be collected, meetings to be planned and attended, workers to be paid, fields to be weeded, teen love quarrels to be mediated, parents to be listened to, lessons to be prepared and music to be practiced, there were three things that kept me sane and focused during my time in Zambia (in addition to a consistent prayer life).

First was visiting with the elders in the community. Even though I was far from fluent in the local language and thus could easily misunderstand or totally not understand what was being said, time with the elders enabled me to sit back, slow down and see the bigger picture, the longer view of life. For them, this view was often focused on the past. These visits helped me to refocus my priorities and see all the good that God had enabled me to witness, receive and participate in.

The second experience was picking up and playing with a small child. Who could resist the innocence, the love and trust of a Zambian

child? They were everywhere, and desired nothing more than a hug, a kiss, a game and a piece of candy. As I walked on a village road I would reach down and lift up one of these precious delights of God, gaze into curious and trusting eyes and absorb the joy of malnourished hugs and smiles.

The third help was viewing the African sunset, a treasure so glorious it can render you breathless as you ponder the greatness of God's creative genius.

And so, as my time in mission started to draw to a close I began to cherish and desire more often these personal refuges of renewal, knowing that they would be greatly missed as I traveled on to the next step in my life. As the last three months of my African adventure were fast approaching I prepared myself for the expected stages and steps of closure. These included: closure at work, trying to secure and assure my replacements in their new positions; closure with the international mission community, both those in my immediate community and the missionaries whom I had befriended from other towns and villages; closure of

*continued on page 2*

### *Shoes to Leave Behind*

*Joe Kornik*

*Inner-City Teaching Corps*

If it's true, as a good friend and fellow volunteer once told me, that the only person who likes change is a wet baby, then you fully understand the transition about to take place in your life.

Packing up, saying goodbye and moving on is never easy, especially in such a unique circumstance — one in which you gave the gift of yourself unconditionally and without reservation.

Well, there may have been a few

tiny reservations, but you got over them quickly, and once you overcame any apprehensions, you were in an environment where you could flourish and grow.

At least that was true in my case.

Four years ago, I headed to Chicago to volunteer with the Inner-City Teaching Corps and had no idea of what I was getting myself into. I lived in community with nine other volunteers and ended up teaching fourth grade at St. Basil's Elementary School on the South Side of Chicago.

Confronting the many perils and pitfalls of teaching, coaching, volunteering and living in community was a difficult task. And just when I felt like I was getting the hang of it, the year came to an end.

Now, the school year has a cyclical nature all its own. With teaching, the highs and lows of the year fall in rapid succession. The chaos of Christmas-time gives way to spring fever and before you know it, kids are counting the school days left in the year.

For me, the sense of closure as a teacher and volunteer was difficult. For awhile, I thought about achieving some perfect ending to the school year, one the kids would never forget. But as I planned various activities and games of departure, I realized that the last day of school for a ten-year-old was a magical thing in and of itself. There was nothing I could do to make three months with no

*continued on page 3*

personal relationships, my closest friends, especially those whom I was almost certain I would not see again. Ah, but the best laid plans....

Mission is always an adventure. There is almost certainly a sudden change in plans, an unexpected situation, event or person. Flexibility is a necessary virtue for the missionary. Thus, as my plans of closure and goodbyes lay neatly in my journal and calendar, life in Zambia brought forth new dimensions of mission for me. A change in the mission personnel prompted some last minute changes in my work at the parish and seminary. A few unexpected pregnancies brought some additional meetings to the calendar. A robbery in the office caused some last minute alarm. (My house had been robbed before several times, but the office contained school funds.) Malaria and a kidney infection caused painful delays in my plans. A youth was murdered by other youths -- the first case of this in the village. A problem pregnancy and a rape victim demanded extra special attention. The financial problems of underpaid striking teachers, upset parents and desperate students brought about all day meetings, conflict mediation and lots of extra prayer!

Thus, my vision of a gradual transition, letting go and saying goodbye (what the experts recommend is most healthy) became a few last minute instructions, rituals, celebrations, tears and hugs. I barely had time to journal my last three months. There was almost more upheaval and disarray during that time than there had been in the two and three quarter years prior! God certainly has a sense of humor and, at that time I thought, a poor sense of timing!

Despite the chaos, I was able to say goodbye and experience letting go of those I held most closely. There were special times of prayer and intimate meals with my closest friends, celebrations and feasts of sweet rice and the local brew with the youths, the parish and the mission community. There was music, dance and drama expertly performed and filled with laughter and life. We had visits of sadness and some of reconciling joy, a beautiful closing liturgy and lots of tears, laughter and hugs (and I'm sure some relief!). I quickly tried to reflect with and enjoy those special friends, special places and treasured experiences that God had gifted me with for three years. It is never easy to let go of such a wonderful and exhausting experience. A part of me wanted to cling to my place there and never leave. There was still so much to be done and so much to be experienced and learned! Despite my three years of discovery and experience among this gifted and challenged community, there were still so many intricacies of Bemba culture to be discovered and understood. The creative tapestry of culture and Christianity that began several decades before and which continued to be woven with grace and mystery, deserved to be honored and contemplated.

Yet God had paved the way for transition despite the craziness amidst the process. There were experienced and newly trained youth ministers and newly disciplined youth leaders for the parish. The school was getting some new

teachers. The seminary had already found a new teacher for Scripture and the seminarians were now competent to teach each other more about music. And so I scrambled to pick up and hold a child, to gaze deeply into the African sky at dusk, to visit once more with the wisest of the community and grasp hold of great friends and good people. Then, with my bag full of photographs and addresses and my heart filled with gratitude, love and pain, I rode off to the next stop on my journey and prayed that it would not be too long until we would meet again.

After a short zip through parts of Europe to visit some friends, I arrived home a few days before Christmas. I had assumed that at least in this part of my journey, coming home, I would be secure. There are several difficulties to coming home at holiday time, both culturally and socially. Everyone is busy with last minute shopping (in malls reeking with over-consumption and materialism), baking, cleaning, preparing; and then Christmas is here and there are many people to visit, meals to be cooked and eaten, songs to be sung, Church services to attend, planes to catch -- hello and goodbye! The average American attention span of five minutes cannot compare with the hours of sitting around the fire in Zambia.

Closure and goodbye does not end when you step on the plane. There is no sudden letting go as you embrace your family and friends. Just as when you left to go to mission it took months of cultural and social adjustment, so it is with bringing closure to your mission experience and becoming ready to begin the next step. As I stumbled through the holidays surrounded by loving yet busy family and friends, I rejoiced in their love. I cried the loss of my African family and friends. I mourned the changes that had taken place in myself and in those close to me. I picked up my teddy bear, gazed into the North Carolina sky, and visited a nursing home. Although I still had not completely said goodbye to my African adventure, I began a new part of my journey. +

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***"A part of me wanted to cling to my place and never leave."***

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***Reflection questions for Megeen's article:***

- 1. Megeen's "vision of a gradual transition, letting go and saying goodbye became a few last minute instructions, rituals, celebrations, tears and hugs." What is your vision of saying goodbye? What do you want to say?*
- 2. Throughout Megeen's article she mentions three things that kept her "sane and focused" during her missionary experience (holding a child, visiting with the elders, and gazing at the African sunset). What do you do now to keep you sane and focused in your community?*
- 3. Some volunteers, like Megeen, write out their plans for coming to closure and saying their goodbyes to co-workers, community and friends. What are your views on why this is important? What happens, for example, when people don't get to say goodbye?*
- 4. Often, volunteers learn to love the values of the culture and society in which they serve. What cultural values, if any, have you learned to appreciate during your term of service?*

school any better. So planned good-byes and perfect endings were lost among juice, cookies, signed shirts and the hectic exchange of phone numbers.

I never found that sense of closure I was seeking.

And would you believe not one child came up to me that last day of school and said: "Thank you for getting up at 6:00 a.m. every day and coming to school to teach us even though you didn't get paid and it didn't get above zero degrees for the entire month of January ...."

Even with the close of the school year, I never felt like I had accomplished everything I wanted. Now, I would be shocked if any one did. Volunteers set their own boundaries and rarely is the work done measurable in any real external sense. You know what you gave of yourself, but undoubtedly projects will remain unfinished, connections will remain incomplete and there will always be that one person you'll feel like you never reached. And maybe you didn't. But when giving of yourself, there really is no end, only a beginning -- a commitment to serve. I consider my life a mission, and there truly is no closure to the calling.

If you are called to serve, you'll serve. You'll give of yourself in some capacity in all aspects of your life. Those places that you've walked are in you.

I read somewhere -- I seriously think this was way back in junior high school or something -- that being a

volunteer is like standing in wet cement. The longer you stay, the harder it is to leave and when you finally decide to move on, you can't do so without leaving your shoes behind.

I wish I could cite the source for you, but my research department is out sick this month. But trust me, someone said it and I've never forgotten it. Since leaving Chicago in June of 1994, I have bounced around as a writer and editor for various magazines. But I often find myself desiring to give more. In that same time, I also have moved in several directions from a service standpoint -- from tutoring at a junior high to working in a community center to spending a Saturday afternoon reading at a retirement home.

I came to realize that when I left, I didn't leave behind those Chicago volunteer experiences, or my more recent tutoring or reading for that matter. I carry them with me always.

So, the question remains: How do you hold on to your idealism after the innocence is gone? And unless you volunteered with Microsoft or IBM, I would guess that the innocence is indeed gone.

For many months after leaving Chicago, I tried to split my life in half: the time I volunteered and the time that followed.

But life is not little chunks of time disconnected from each other. I'm more focused now on viewing my life as a continuum. Teaching in Chicago was one year, one shared gift, one experience in an entire lifetime.

Sure there were final retreats and final dinners and all types of planned closure

activities. But I would be hard-pressed to share with you what went on at those closing ceremonies. Thinking back now, I was way too focused on trying to put it all in perspective and figure out when I would see all these people who were once strangers to me just one year before. And I'm not sure if anyone can have a clear head those final weeks. Thoughts and emotions are in overdrive, and you can't be both active participant and observer in your own life.

Once you are a few months removed from the volunteer experience, things will open up to you and you'll discover much more about yourself and your year. I know I did.

Sure, I kept journals and photos and other keepsakes and reminders, but what remains most is the sense of mission and the calling I shared with those house-mates.

While I admit I don't stay in touch with every single person, I do work hard to strengthen several friendships I formed nearly four years ago. And while we've all gone down our individual paths, we still share many similarities. We get together, albeit often via email, to compare notes and stories.

We're not so much trying to recapture that feeling of our shared experiences -- nostalgia can be a dangerous thing -- but rather, trying to reconnect in a way that will remind us of why we all decided to volunteer in the first place.

So the end of the year is not an end at all. It is a beginning. And we all have many shoes still to leave behind. +

***"I consider my life a mission, and there truly is no closure to the calling."***

***"We're... trying to reconnect in a way that will remind us of why we all decided to volunteer in the first place."***

**Reflection questions for Joe's article:**

1. For both Joe and Megeen, closure was difficult and the planned goodbyes and perfect endings were lost among hectic activities. Joe felt he did not accomplish all he wanted. What jobs do you feel you still need to complete? What is necessary and what is sufficient in the time you have left?
2. As Joe said, no one ever feels like they have done all that they were capable of doing. Reflect on the positive things that you were able to accomplish, the people you've touched and differences you've made since you have been at your placement.
3. Being a volunteer four years prior, Joe has realized that he didn't leave behind those Chicago experiences, that he carries them with him always. What did you carry with you from your volunteer experience or what words, visions and feelings do you hope to carry with you?
4. If your term of service is not yet finished, what can you do now to help you start preparing for the inevitable process of closure, whether it is a few months or a few years away?

## "Goodbyes" in the Bible

What's YOUR approach to saying "goodbye" to your volunteer experience?  
Consider these examples of goodbyes in the Bible.  
Any remind you of your own personal style?



### The "I'll be back" approach: *The Good Samaritan returning to help*

(Luke 10:29-37) The good foreigner (Samaritan) took care of the mugged traveler, paid the inn-keeper for services and promised to return to the inn and to continue helping the wounded man. Do you feel like some day you'll be back - either to volunteer, to work at your placement, to continue in a similar field, or to move to the area in which you served?

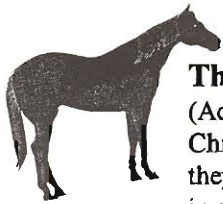


### The "I better not look back" approach: *Lot's wife turning into salt*

(Genesis 19:15-26) One of the "good guys" in the Old Testament was with his family, fleeing from the bad townsmen of Sodom and was told by the angels not to look back to watch God wiping out that town. But Mrs. Lot did not listen and turned into a pillar of salt. Is there something that makes you feel like you can't look back? Is it too hard to leave? Do you feel the pressure to move on and only look forward?

### The "I've lost my innocence" approach: *Adam and Eve leaving paradise*

(Genesis: 3:1-7 and 3:20-24) A lot of volunteers go off to "save the world" but as they work with the marginalized of our society, their eyes are opened up to more than they ever realized. When it comes time to leave, volunteers can't just put these positive and negative images and memories behind them. Do you feel like Adam and Eve, what you will never return to the state of innocence (naivete) you may have possessed before you made the decision to volunteer?



### The "I feel like I've been blind-sided" approach: *St. Paul knocked from his horse*

(Acts: 9:1-9) After the fall, Paul was blinded but then changed his whole point of view and converted to Christ! Sometimes volunteers are hit by something they didn't see coming and can't quite express how they are feeling. When they leave their volunteer placement, life can be a blur that they'll eventually see in a clearer perspective. What are some developments that you never would have expected to happen? Are you able to express how you are feeling during this time of transition?

## ¿ ¿ ¿ Did you know ? ? ?

The Pallotti Center has the "WHAT'S NEXT?" NOTEBOOK. Ask your program director for a copy. This notebook is designed to help you during your transition from being a volunteer and moving forward to the next step—whatever it may be!

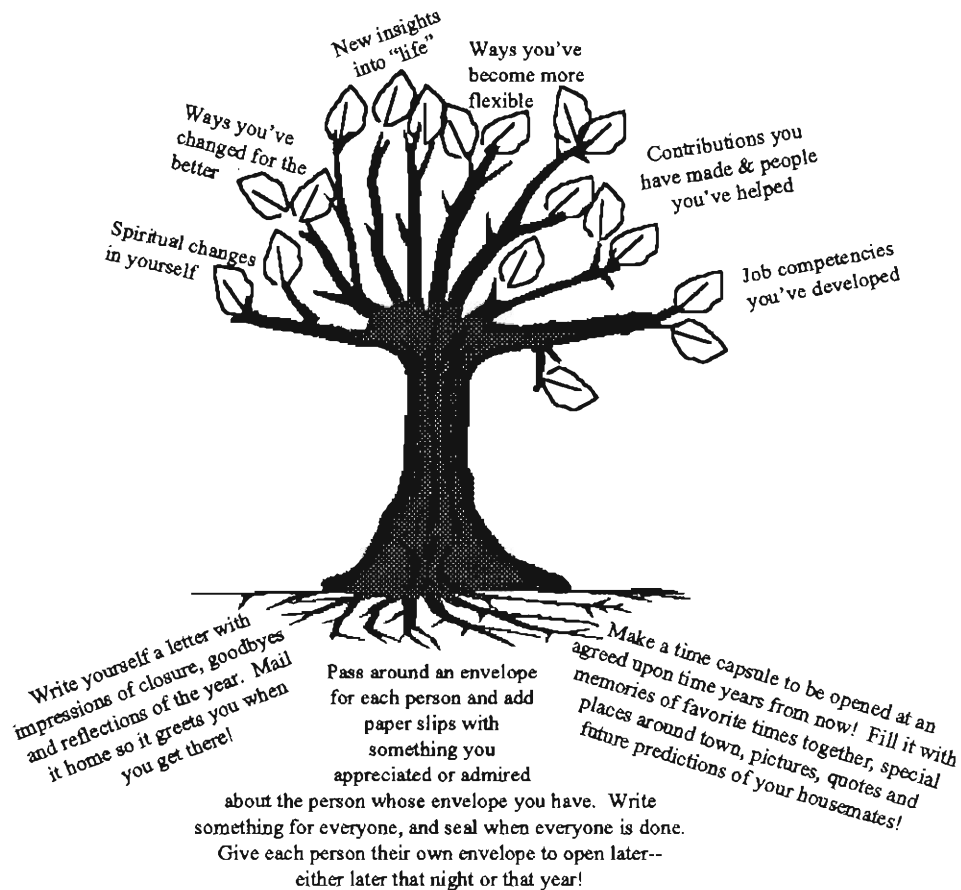
And did you know we have a NETWORK OF FORMER VOLUNTEERS? Whether you are moving to a new area or going home, find out what formers live there and who may be interested in helping people like yourself find employment, tell you about affordable areas to live in or even get together for different social or spiritual activities! Call your program director for the network form and the lists!

We also have a JOB BANK for returning and returned volunteers. We send out a monthly mailing of job listings from church and non-profit sectors. Feel free to call Susie Mullaney at the National Pallotti Center Office at 202-529-3330 for more information or simply fill out the form in the back of the "What's Next?" Notebook or from our website: <http://www.cua.edu/www/rel/pallotti>



# The Closure Tree

As you get ready to "leave," see how you have "branched out" by reflecting on the suggested topics in the tree. Use the activities below ground to help keep your experience and your community "rooted" in your life!



## For Former Volunteers

Have you lost touch with your housemates? Here are some simple suggestions to help rekindle the connection with your former community:

\*\*\* Call your housemates and get their current address and email! Set up an email list so you can write them all at the same time! \*\*\* Start a letter, and pass it on to another housemate, who will add to it, and pass it on to another. Once everyone has added something, make copies of the entire letter and send it to all. \*\*\* If this works, add a blank tape and have each person add some songs reminiscent of your volunteer year! \*\*\* Still have double pictures from your year? Send them as postcards! \*\*\* Get crafty (remember *that* from volunteering?) and make your housemates birthday packages. \*\*\* Send birthday cards. \*\*\* Write a reflective spirituality activity and mail it out. Ask people to write back to you and copy anything that they share. \*\*\* Share recipes. \*\*\* Plan a reunion or a retreat with housemates. \*\*\*

## A Biblical Reflection

At the end of his life on earth, having shared his Last Supper with his friends, Jesus told them he was leaving, going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them (John 14:3). He and the Father would return and "make our home with" whoever loved Jesus (John 14:23). He also said he would send his friends "another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth" (John 14:16) "who will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26).



The Church and world are still discovering, through the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ in this world, and how Christ makes a difference in our lives and in the world.

### Questions for you to think about:

1. Where in your volunteer experiences have you found this spirit of Jesus?
2. Ideally speaking, which of your best qualities or "spirit" would you want to live on and be present in the lives of your community after you have completed your volunteer service and said your goodbyes?

## Shared Visions

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### The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center:

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. 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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