



# 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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## In this issue: Nurturing yourself

Stories from *Katie* and *John*, former volunteers who found ways to nurture themselves spiritually, mentally and physically.

### **Chicken Soup for the Volunteers**

We thought you could use a good dose of homecookin' or at least ideas on how to treat your body and mind in a healthy way during these next months.

**Prayer?** How does it fit in with real life? Check out our reflection on the back cover.

### **Wipe-Out**

by *John Garry*  
*LaSallian Volunteers*



I had an incredible bike wipe-out a couple of months ago. It was the first day in my new, little, Roman neighborhood. Eager to impress the locals, I gallantly came forth from my apartment standing tall astride my sparkling bike wearing state-of-the-art gear. I smiled at the gentlemen who

were chatting (about me, I presumed) across the street, hopped on my bike and zipped away in a graceful flash—except that my chain was off and my front tire was flat. I didn't tip-over or even crash. It was more like blasting oneself into the road. As these nice folks were helping me up off the street, about seven feet from my front door, I smiled at them and laughed. I had done it again.

"Just because I don't care doesn't mean I'm not listening," Homer Simpson says to his children as they talk and he watches television. I know the feeling. About two years ago, I was really struggling. I had been directing a volunteer program for a couple of years. It was a job I loved with people I liked. I was lucky to be doing something that made me feel so fully alive. I could not imagine a job consisting of so many things important to me. In time, though, things got to be a little too much for me. There seemed to be no limit to the amount of energy, time, and care necessary to keep the program growing and moving. I poured myself into the job. The downside started creeping in on me: feeling sorry for myself and my lack of a personal life; struggling for the energy to socialize; wanting a relationship but knowing I couldn't give one much effort; feeling guilty about less than efficient work

*continued on page 2*

### **On The Journey Towards Peace**

by *Katie Floyd*

*Alliance for Catholic Education*

At the risk of sounding very trite to the reading audience of former volunteers, I must be quite honest. I did not really know much about myself before volunteering full-time. I owe a large part of my self-awareness -- my strengths, my weaknesses, my growth in spirituality -- to my time as an "ACER."

From 1994-1996, I was given the distinct privilege of serving as a member in the first class of the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), a teaching/service program which was launched out of the University of Notre Dame. The experience was one which I will never forget. While teaching in Louisiana, I met some amazing people; I sampled a culture unlike my upbringing in the suburbs of Chicago, and I enjoyed the highest highs and suffered the lowest lows I have ever faced.

It was the strangest phenomenon -- I used to come home so completely drained from a day's work, yet, at the same time I could feel so energized from a connection I had made with a student earlier in the day or from a good discussion I had with a fellow colleague. What I quickly learned,

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otherwise I would lose it."*

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however, was that I needed somehow to make sense of the drastic swings of emotions I was experiencing. I needed to make time for MYSELF once in a while, otherwise I would lose it. For me, the following four things have helped me over the past few years to become slightly more balanced than I would have been without them: prayer, family/friends/community, service to others (separate from the one you are already doing), and personal time.

**Prayer.** Religiously speaking, I guess you could call me a "late bloomer" -- ironically enough, I did not really discover the religious beauty of Notre Dame until after graduating from the institution. Before moving to Louisiana in the Fall of '94, my 39 fellow ACERs and I had eight weeks of intensive teacher training on my alma mater's campus. Along with student teaching each morning, classes in the afternoon, and seminars in the evening, Mass was offered at each day's end. Without much thought, I must have attended over three-fourths of the Masses that summer. The days during that summer were extremely busy and packed with

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performance; sheer loneliness; being out of shape; living away from family and close friends. Perhaps worst of all was an unfinished masters thesis sitting in a cardboard box--for almost 3 years. My earlier life of "really living" had not only stagnated--it was getting covered in dust.

Although I was probably doing a decent job at work and presenting to people a fairly happy person, I was slowly slipping into sleepless nights and sad, tired mornings with a melancholic air filling my bedroom. I knew I needed to get control of things, but no matter how many nights I told myself I would get going, the following day's activities produced nothing but another restless night and ugly morning.

Finally, I reached out. I sort of came clean with some people I knew could help me. With help, I came to see that I had started to live a life based on the premise that if I appeared to have my act together that meant I did have my act together. My sense of reality needed a heavy dose of reality.

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*"I remember thinking, 'This is life.  
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you weirdo.' "*

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There were two very basic factors in snapping out of it. The first was to worry less about what people thought of me and to start getting a little more self-centered. It was almost a radical notion to start thinking more about myself and get more in touch with who I was, what I liked, what I really wanted, what I was good at, and what I struggled with. Really, it was great. The pressure was off. It was as if I had thrown open the windows and let in fresh air. I needed to accept some of the junk I had been packing into a crowded room of self-disappointment and frustration caused by unmet

**Reflection questions from John's article:**

1. John describes "pouring" himself into his job in post-volunteer years and not having energy for his social or personal life. In what ways do you balance your work life, personal life and community life?
2. Have you ever felt, as John did, "stuck" or as though your real self was getting "covered in dust?" Volunteers and former volunteers can feel this way, e.g., when the job, community life or relationships aren't working right. How do (or would) you go about getting "unstuck?"
3. Both John and Katie speak of self-discoveries. Katie discovered that the solution to daily chaos is prayer. John discovered he needed to get more in touch with who he is, etc. Describe a self-discovery that you have experienced this year.

work responsibilities. Also, there was something funny about it. I remember thinking, "This is life. It's normal. Stop freaking out, you weirdo." Humor helped a great deal. With the help of some other people I knew who cared about me, I could affectionately laugh at myself. It was human to be a little goofed up.

Second, I realized I needed to go after the single most frustrating issue--the thesis. I used an approach I'd never given much thought to before: setting goals. The idea of goals, I had always thought, was only for people who lacked the character to push themselves. Duh! A plan of some attainable, yet progress-oriented goals was exactly what I

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with myself and others..."*

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needed. I finished my masters thesis in a few months. It was no masterpiece, but it was significantly better than a box full of yellowing notes and paper.

I haven't become this caring, sharing, task-oriented superhuman. As a matter of fact, I had to work through another bout of gloom about a year later. But I did a little bit better the next time around--acknowledging the "Homerish" traits of listening but not caring. The cause and remedies were different, but the plan of attack was basically the same: be honest with myself and others and think of specific things that will show me I am doing better. And I do think I will be stronger and more genuine in the future: living without having to shake off the dust, stumbling (or even blasting myself) into the ground, but getting up with a smile. †

**beverages**

## How to make your coffee taste like a gourmet espresso

- ☑ **Café Vienna:** Sprinkle cinnamon on top of the coffee grounds before pouring the water.
- ☑ **Café Mocha:** Put a spoonful of hot cocoa powder into your coffee.
- ☑ **Café au Lait:** Combine a half cup of heated milk to a half cup of coffee.
- ☑ **Café Vanilla:** Add a dash of vanilla extract.
- ☑ **Café Ireland:** Put a teaspoon of generic brand liqueurs like Irish Cream, Kahlua or Peppermint for a holiday treat.

**Don't drink coffee?**

Use the above suggestions for hot cocoa instead!



thought-provoking issues (How did I feel about mainstreaming disabled students? How would I deal with an irate parent? Why had I been called to do this?). I soon found one solution to the daily chaos. Prayer. I had finally discovered it, on my own.

Since that summer, I have made an effort to go to Mass. There are many reasons why I go -- to worship, for fellowship, for peace-of-mind, for answers to questions that my Religion students have asked. The thing is, I am finally going because I want to go. And it is out of that desire that I believe I have gained just a little bit more peace in my life.

**Family/Friends/Community.** I will never forget one day in particular during my first four weeks as a teacher. It had been a horrible day at school for some reason -- I think I was trying very hard to prove myself to a class of students, and it just wasn't working. The funny thing is, now I don't remember exactly what had made the day so horrible. I just remember what happened at the end of the day, when I started to learn a little about the meaning of community living.

One of my five housemates was also teaching at my school and she must have picked up my "I'm having a really bad day" vibe (I had thought I was better at hiding it than that). She told my four other housemates before I came home and when I came home there was dinner on the table and shouts of: "We love you, Floyd!!" I broke down, partly because I was upset from the day, partly because I had only known

them for a few months and it already started to feel like a family. We shared dinner, and then we decided to drop everything and go bowling. No work got done that evening, and it was the best solution to a rough day.

Community living can be extremely difficult at times, and our community was never without its own problems. But as I reflect on my two years with the same community of people in ACE, I can honestly say that our good times far outweighed the bad times. I truly do believe that sometimes the easiest and best solution is that which lies right in front of you. In this case, it was support given by my housemates. At times I have tried to be a bit too brave and to tackle my problems all alone. The minute I talk it

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out with a friend or community member, however, I am reminded of the fact that they are there for me, just as I am for them. I can rely on them to offer a unique perspective to the situation, or just suggest that "it's time to go bowling."

**Service to others.** I am no longer volunteering full-time; nor have I chosen to continue teaching this year. Currently, I work for a non-profit organization whose mission, among other things, is to uphold the ethic and practice of community service by supporting national service programs. Though I truly believe in what I do, it is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day work environment and forget why I chose to work there in the first place.

Last Friday, some people in the building where I work coordinated an annual Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless at Lafayette Park -- the park right in front of the White House. What amazing

perspective I gained during that afternoon alone. How foolish I felt when I realized that earlier that morning I was complaining about losing the mailing labels for a large mailing I needed to send out -- when down the street there were people who barely receive one meal a day and who, despite our best efforts, would be denied from our turkey dinner because we simply did not have enough for everybody.

As former volunteers who are searching for a meaningful profession, who are planning a family, or who are returning to school to learn more about how to impact the world, we often barely have time to do community service. I myself feel guilty that I don't do more. One thing that I have found is that when I can and do make the time, however, I find myself back on track. As you all know, there's nothing like focusing on other people for a while to help you realize that your own problems are usually pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

**Personal time.** Last, but not necessarily least, during these past few years I have found an increasing need to spend some time by myself, doing what I enjoy. Whether it's jogging, writing a letter, reading a magazine, or talking on the phone, that time spent away from daily challenges has offered a renewed sense of vision and perspective. For me, there's not much more to it than this: if I want to be the person I wish to be -- if I want to really be present for others, then I need to balance time spent with them next to time spent for myself.

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These suggestions are by no means a panacea to anyone's problems. They are merely suggestions upon which I rely as often as I think of them. (I admit, sometimes I don't heed my own advice!) I like to think of these suggestions as pit stops on the journey toward peace in my life. Some weeks I make more stops than others, and that's fine. I've made no rules about the speed with which I travel. I just travel with confidence in the steps I take to get there. +

### Reflection questions from Katie's article:

1. Religiously speaking, Katie described herself as a "late bloomer." How would you describe where you are with regard to spirituality or faith?
2. Katie realized that she needs to spend time to herself, doing what she enjoys otherwise she would "lose it." In what ways do you create time for yourself?
3. How have you "been there" for your housemates on their bad days? In what ways can you do more to build a true community?

**"Follow your bliss, and doors will open  
where you did not know they were going to be."**

--Joseph Campbell

Now we just need to figure out our "bliss!" Joseph Campbell, the famous researcher and author, spent a long and fruitful life studying the world's cultures and their life-giving mythical stories. He concluded that a universal wisdom is somehow summed up in the above statement.

Simply put, Campbell believed that deep within each person, there's an intuitive knowledge of what she or he wants most in life. By following where your heart is, you will discover an inner source of joy and refreshment, the eternal life within you. "Follow your bliss," listen to where your heart is leading you, and obstacles will melt away and you will live life to the fullest.

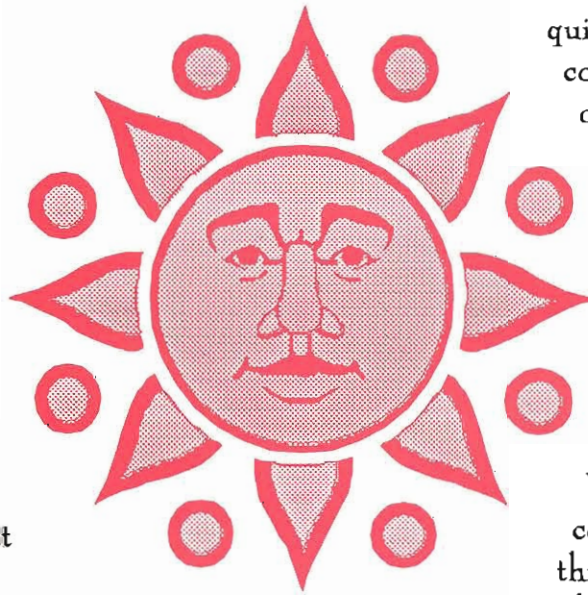
Here are some questions and activities to help you discover your "bliss:"

- If you were to imagine a "dream day" in your work-life, what kind of work would you be doing? With whom would you be working? Describe the work setting, hours, challenges and salary.

- If you were to imagine a "dream day" full of leisure time, what are the kind of activities you would most enjoy? Who would you be with? Where would you be?

- If you were to imagine a "dream day" in your future family life five or ten years down the road, describe what you picture.

- To what extent is there a religious or spiritual aspect to any of these "dream days?" **Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is within you, where your heart is.** So, to what extent are these "dream days" *heaven* for you?



- Is it easier for you to think of your worst *nightmare* kind of job and life? Describe what these would look like!

- Identify someone that you haven't quite connected with. Make a conscious effort to have one-on-one contact with this person. Subtly, find out what this person enjoys. Go out for coffee and ask them to describe *their* "bliss."

- What is it that helps you to relax and feel at peace-- a long walk, a good game, a bath? Whatever it is, make a commitment to do two of these things within the next two weeks. Write them down & stick to doing them.

- What are some things that you feel you should have said "no" to? Do you find yourself agreeing to odd jobs that stress you out or genuinely aren't meaningful to you? How can you better use your time to be true to yourself?



# Chicken Soup for the Volunteer

You all must have stories that would warm our hearts like the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, but this is just some good old fashioned advice. Like Grandma's chicken soup, we hope they make you feel a little bit better:

During the winter months, nature is actually on your side! When it is cold outside, your body has to work harder to keep warm. So, whether you are raking leaves, shoveling snow, skiing or even walking, you'll burn more calories than you would doing a similar activity in the summer.

Stretching banishes stress-related fatigue.

Centering yourself when you stretch is actually a form of meditation.

If it is starting to get dark earlier in the evening, try waking up early to enjoy the sunlight, eat a good breakfast, exercise or read the paper.

Think of three things for which you are grateful before falling asleep.

Spicy foods boost your metabolism. Try new spices to enhance your staple dishes.

Eat early, snack sensibly and don't skip meals.

Brush your teeth with your opposite hand inviting the right lobe of your brain to be more intuitive.

Focus on the present-- the current tasks at hand, rather than harping on the past or stressing about the future.

Regular exercise releases muscle tension, increases blood flow and energy level and improves your quality of life.

Exercising in the early evening is the best time for effectiveness. Take a friend-- to commit you to follow through, to help push your limits, and for safety purposes!

Learn about and try a new way to pray-- for example, through: music, poems, dance, journaling, meditation, guided imagery or exercises.

Lowering your shoulders relaxes the muscles in your back and chest.

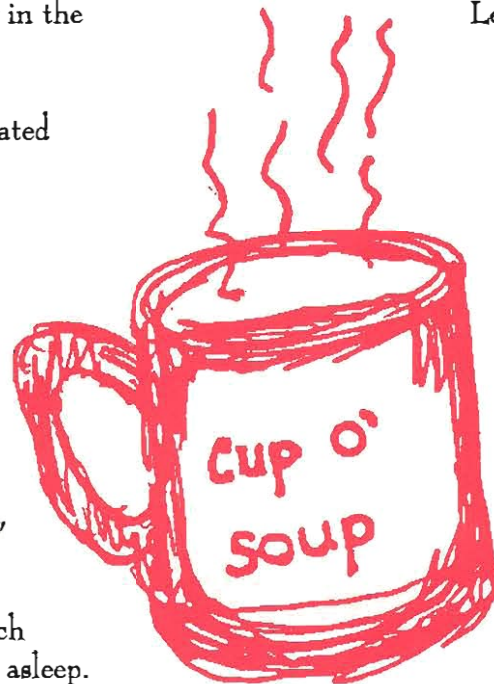
A hobby can keep you from worrying-- especially if it is one that takes a lot of concentration, like playing an instrument or juggling.

Listening to soothing music actually helps to lower blood pressure, relax muscles and calm anxieties.

Spending time with friends-- just being social relieves tension & can often improve your overall outlook on life.

In one study, people who merely *watched* a movie about Mother Teresa helping the poor showed increased levels of immunoglobulin A, the body's first defense against infections. (Try watching *Entertaining Angels*, *Romero*, or *City of Joy*)

Read something inspirational each night before going to bed and first thing when you wake up.



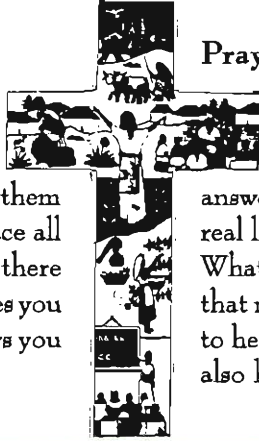
Some of the above were taken from Blue Cross/ Blue Shield's *Health News*, Fall 1994 and from the *Bay Area Volunteer's Hand Book*, Ashland, OR: Earth Works Press, 1996. Drawing by former Jesuit Volunteer and Sojourners Intern, Judy Coode.

# Prayer?

*Is your prayer style all talk? How does it fit in with your daily life? When you are aware of and responsive to your surroundings, or "real life," is that prayer? Consider the following biblical stories which describe two of Jesus' views about prayer:*

## Prayer as centering yourself?

Mark's gospel (6:30 ff) describes the disciples' first burst of good deeds. They worked with so many people that it left them with "no time even to eat." Jesus told them straight out to come away to an isolated place all by themselves to rest. As a volunteer, are there times you feel distanced from yourself? Times you feel you need to retreat? What are some ways you center or balance yourself?



## Prayer as listening and reading signs of real life?

Matthew's gospel (11:1-6) recounts that the imprisoned John the Baptist sent his followers to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah. Jesus answered: Go and tell John what you see happening in real life: the lame walk, the blind see and the deaf hear. What are some positive real life events that you know of that may be the signs of the times to which God wants us to hear? Are there negative trends or developments you also know of? How can you turn these into prayer?

## Shared Visions

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**Editor:** Andrew Thompson · **Production Editor:** Sarah Coggins

**Advisors:** Rev. Frank Donio, S.A.C., Susie Mullaney, Rev. Bob Kinast, Bill Lowell, Sr. Anita Joseph Reeves and Pallotti Center Directors: Patrick Marcham, Diane McKinna, Joan Smith, Kate Christou and Kate Carter.

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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.*



The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center  
for Apostolic Development  
<http://www.cua.edu/www/org/pallotti>  
Box 893-Cardinal Station  
Washington, DC 20064  
(202) 529-3330

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