



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:

Volunteers as Family

Linda Ferriero and Brian Fyock share their experiences about how living in a volunteer community was like living as a family -- both full of love and daily problems!

Also inside:

If you were a boat, what kind of boat would you be? See page 4.

Ask Vinnie, the Former Volunteer, for advice on cohesive community living -- page 5.

Feel like your boat is taking on water? Check out our biblical reflection on page 6.

Becoming a Family

by Linda Ferriero
Jesuit Volunteer Corps

Eight years ago I began a journey. Had I set out on a solo mission dedicating myself to social justice and a simple lifestyle guided by prayer alone, I would have abandoned ship shortly after setting sail. The gift of being part of a Christian community empowered me, step-by-step, to walk with Christ in the form of human companions. This journey of love will continue for the rest of my life.

The glimpses of Christian community that I had in my family, friendship, and parish experiences were key in inviting, shaping, and propelling me toward the decision to venture into a year of service in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. The experience of being a teacher for 200 students that year was a priceless "crash course" teaching me volumes about children and myself. Likewise, being a part of our JVC community was an invaluable training ground for marriage and other deeply meaningful relationships. The power of being part of the larger JVC community

"The greatest gift we gave each other that year was our individual and shared commitment..."

(consisting of former volunteers, the administrators and co-workers of the places where we served, the Jesuit order and the volunteers who were serving that same year in other cities) was inspiring, but the community I shared a roof with moved me personally.

When the eight of us (5 women and 3 men) first met each other at orientation, we listened attentively as former volunteers recounted their community experiences and "nightmares" as well as offered time honored

guidelines for successful community living. Each story deepened our resolve to make our community "work." Within the JVC circle we were

known as "Gano" (the name of our street) which kind of became our family name. The greatest gift that we gave each other that year was our individual and shared commitment to the constant work, the constant love of our community. We each uniquely personified that commitment in ways that encompassed our personalities, talents, strengths, weaknesses, fears, hopes and histories. Every week, we all worked hard to be true to: a shared community prayer experience, a social "fun night," rotating house chore responsibilities and a community

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Living in Close Community

by Brian Fyock

Xaverian Brothers Volunteer Corps

When I thought about how my year-long Bolivian volunteer experience related to family and community living, I could not help but think of my overnight visit the family of one of my students. They lived in a remote village about a three-hour hike up a nearby mountain. The student's name was Modesto, and like most of our students who attended the boarding school in which I worked, he was a 10-year old Quechuan Indian who hiked to school every week with his younger brother, 7-year old Augustin. Modesto asked if I would like to accompany him on his trip home and I thought it might be kind of fun. It turned out to be one of the most incredible weekends of my life.

"We were a family, and just like every family, imperfect."

After eating a chicken I had helped kill for dinner, the family and I spent some time talking and soon it was time to turn in for the night. I went to the room in which I had put down my backpack. I quickly learned I was in the bedroom of the two room compound, the only bedroom for Modesto, his four brothers, mother, father, and grandmother. This was no great big room by the way. Made of adobe bricks, the room was maybe 7 x 15 feet with single beds on either side. The family insisted that I sleep in one of the beds, while three of Modesto's little brothers slept in the other. That left Modesto, Augustin, Mom, Dad, and Grandmother on the floor with animal skins for mattresses. I was in shock and insisted that at least the sixty year-old grandmother take the bed in my place. I later learned, however, that the parents and grandmother always slept on the floor, as it was cooler. There was

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meeting to help keep us informed and sensitive to each other. The glue that held us together was gathering around the dinner table each evening sharing grace, stories, silly antics and concerns along with our meal. Perhaps our biggest challenges were the things we couldn't schedule like learning to differentiate between a "need" and a "want" or suspending judgment on each other's extravagances in simple lifestyles or the need to bravely confront

"We were constantly challenged to put the value of 'people above things'..."

"instances" before they festered into "issues." Learning how to make decisions together that respected the perspective and needs of each person significantly stretched our patience, creativity and hearts. We also had endless opportunities to both confront and forgive each other's shortcomings in punctuality, forgotten phone messages, tub scrubbing standards and empty gas tanks. We were constantly challenged to put the value of "people above things" and rewarded with the gifts of trust, growth and friendship.

One of the most uncomfortable experiences of my life came in May of that year. I felt a gripping tension between me and a community member

with whom I also worked. The issues of trust, responsibility and honesty straining our relationship were huge to me; I had to make a decision whether to give up hope until August or to confront these areas that were draining me of a lot of energy. Part of me wanted to "consult" the rest of the community, to vindicate my feelings and anger. When I realized that wouldn't give life to anything constructive, I knew I had to summon the courage to confront someone I loved but feared alienating or hurting. To this day I draw strength from that exchange. We both worked through our anger and defensiveness, gained a new respect and appreciation for each other and moved toward healing. I can't say we completely resolved our situation, but because of that experience I am able to believe in people even when there is adversity and to bravely open doors of communication with hope.

The conversations our community shared that explored our day, our faith, our society or our crossroads ventured into new terrain that I would not have covered had I tried to go it alone. Prayer candles and birthday candles illuminated new faces of ourselves within the circle and breathed life into our community. We were commissioned at Eucharist, at breakfast and over 45-cent beers to be Christ's companions to real people. Individual reactions to gunshots fired outside of windows, packs of stray dogs in our streets, the Gulf War erupting in our world and the pain witnessed in our jobs may have stopped any of us in our tracks had we been alone. Faced together, these experiences were woven into our consciences and gave us reason to carry on. When our house was broken into, it

profoundly revealed the gift that these seven relationships were to me. The fact that no one was hurt and that we were staying in this together strengthened our bond to each other.

On my wedding day, my entire community flew in from points across the country to fill the table next to my family. Their presence fulfilled my life-long dream of having a large family. While we lived together, the telephone was always a coveted piece, our connection to our friends, families, support systems and previous life. One line shared by eight people. Today it remains a

"My spirit continues to be filled by that union of spirits..."

life line that connects us to each other. Even when months pass between direct conversations with them, I value the voice they have in my heart that gives me the unique perspectives, humor or wisdom I imagine they would share. They inspire me, make me grateful and travel with me still. Several of them are like aunts and uncles to my children. All of them are treasured for the lessons, love, laughter and pains we shared. My spirit continues to be fueled by that union of spirits, a partnership that demanded the fulfillment of a shared dream. A united dream of compassion, empowerment, healing, and embracing God in humankind, in loving service, in each other. +

main dishes

"Family Style" Meals with Your Community

Eating together can help create an atmosphere for bonding within your house. You can all cook together and/or have each person contribute an ingredient to complete the meal. Here are some of our favorite buffet style meals:

- * Pancakes and toppings
- * Group soup
- * Personal pizzas
- * Make your own tacos
- * Baked potato bar
- * Granola trail mix

Reflection questions from Linda's article:

1. Did your community agree to a commitment of certain activities like Linda's group? If so, revisit these commitments. If not, what would you like to commit to for the rest of your service?
2. If there are strained relations within your group, what can be done to build a "new respect and move toward healing?"
3. What gifts do each of your community members bring to your "family" or home? If your group is not cohesive, or if you are alone, are there other individuals who could act as support or "family" for you at this time?
4. When community members feel personal distrust or anger toward each other, it takes special courage to talk to one another about the differences. To what extent do you think honest talking is the best policy? Are you more of a "confronter" or a "coaster?" How does this affect your community?

not an inch of vacant space on the floor, and I barely slept that night from the biting fleas and the wool blanket and pillow. Now that was living in close community!

I mention this story because when I look back on my volunteer experience, one of the themes that normally surfaces is community. When asked what the hardest part of my volunteer experience was, I usually answer, "the isolation." My definition of isolation was nothing as remote as Modesto's family's village; however, it was still a drastic change from what I was used to. I was not by myself. I had 3 other volunteers (all in our early twenties), 2 Xaverian brothers (in their fifties), and 100 elementary students with me. Our boarding school was located in a town of about 500 people, a six-hour jeep ride to the nearest city. We had no electricity except when we ran our generator for three hours every night. No phones, no mailbox, no shopping malls. We took turns making the half hour jeep ride to the local Bishop's house every Sunday for church, use of his phone, and mail service.

Although we had our own bedrooms and the house in which

"... I soon realized there was nowhere to hide."

we lived was also worlds more modern than Modesto's compound, it was still "close community." The personalities of my fellow volunteers and Brothers would prove to be critical in the day to day skirmishes, fights, arguments, and laughter that would occur throughout the year. We had to work together – there were only the six of us. If two of us were not getting along one day, everybody suffered. As much as we tried not to, there was a lot of gossiping, talking behind each other's backs, and people taking sides and rushing to judgment.

The extroverts of our "family" would want to resolve the problems quickly; the introverts would keep it all inside until they had to say something. Adding everybody's idiosyncrasies on top of homesickness, loneliness, a stale diet of soup and potatoes five days a week, and a hundred screaming kids – I soon realized that there was nowhere to hide. I could not run off to the movies, the mall or a friend's house. We were stuck with each other, for better or for worse, and we realized that the longer we waited to resolve a situation the harder it was to do so. We had such little free time that it was difficult to give up this sparse opportunity for personal time to work on "issues." We couldn't just leave the kids and shut our door whenever we needed to talk. Some days the only rest we received was to escape to the bathroom.

Although we wanted to go on retreats more often or we knew we needed to take the time to share, we had too much work to do. After coming back from a four-day retreat once, I wondered how it was that everyone got along so well together. At the retreat's end, my community was so sad and nobody wanted the weekend to end. We hoped instead that we could just extend the weekend forever. A friend told me that the reason retreats only last for a few days was that if they were any longer

people would be so sick of each other they would be at each other's throats.

Our volunteer experience was a lot longer than your average retreat, and living in close community was not easy for us. Close community required patience, love, and a commitment to one another. We were a family, and just like every family, imperfect. That was a hard concept to grasp in the beginning as I began my volunteer experience with an idealistic vision that we four volunteers would each become life-long friends and be the closest of families. We did become a close family, but my expectation that these three strangers would come to Bolivia with the same feelings, goals, hopes and desires was a bit too unrealistic. We would struggle through good weeks and bad. There were times when we would have to call "special" meetings to voice our concerns, and there were times when we needed to let somebody just be themselves.

In the end we found a balance. After months of living and working together we began to recognize each person's strengths, weaknesses, talents and limitations. We learned to take all the gifts each one of us possessed and to work together, trying to appreciate each person for who they were, not who we wanted them to be. Leaving that family two and half years ago was one of the most difficult days in my life. It was a strong friendship that

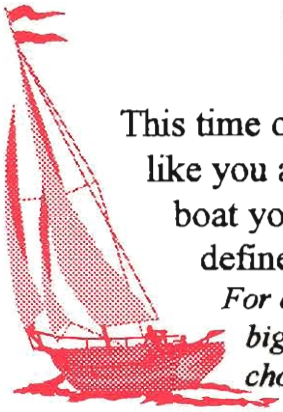
" The good times were made all the more special with knowledge that we had worked hard at it..."

had been forged over the fourteen months we were together. I do not think it would have been as strong if it were not for the difficult times in which we had to muster the courage and love to forgive and reconcile with each other. The good times were made all the more special with knowledge that we had worked hard at it, even through the tough times, to live in close community with one another, taking each day one at a time. +

Reflection questions from Brian's article:

1. What do you do when you feel "stuck", like Brian did -- feeling that there is nowhere to hide or escape from your community? What outlets, activities or refuges do you seek out to maintain your sanity?
2. Brian's volunteer "family" came to accept their own "imperfection" through patience, love and commitment to each other. What have you done personally and as a community to help become a functional unit? What can still be done before your term of service is over?
3. What practical advice would you give a community of "busy bees" who really do have extraordinary work loads or overcommitted schedules, yet also want more of a community life together?

Ship Ahoy, Mate!



This time of year you may feel like you are experiencing smooth sailing, or you may feel like you are going through some rough waters. Either way, think about what kind of boat you are sailing on and why. Look at the list below -- we deliberately did not define these boats so you can describe them to fit yourself.

For example, you may choose the Titanic because your volunteer experience has been the biggest party of your life or because it has been a disaster waiting to happen. If you choose a raft you may feel like you are just floating along or you may describe it as a white water raft -- ready for rapids and adventure. So, be creative and pick your ship!

Noah's Ark
Sail Boat
Titanic
Love Boat

Coast Guard
Kayak
Battleship
Pirate Ship

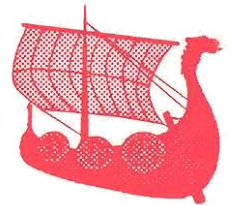
Canoe
Tug Boat
Raft
Submarine

Speed Boat
Viking Ship
Ship of Fools
Hospital Ship

Life Boat
S.S. Minnow
Row Boat
Aircraft Carrier

Gather your community and share with each other the type of boat you are on and most importantly, why you feel this way.

Look at the list again. If your community members (or co-workers) were on a boat all together, what type of ship would describe your relationship at this stage in the year?



Diving in even deeper...

Just like Jacques Cousteau, you may realize that there is a lot to discover deep down. Within your own fleet (either your community or with a group of support people), ask each other the following questions:



What is your community's "safe harbor" -- times when your group feels safe to share with each other or situations where you get along well together?



What is usually going on when your community experiences "rough waters"?



Does your community need a *pirate ship* to stir things up? Could your community use a *hospital ship* to heal a wound? Are there *any* ships from the list above that could help balance out your fleet? Identify the characteristics of the ship and explain how they might help.



Suggest a constructive way for each community member to take on one of the above balancing characteristics to help round out your fleet and move toward smoother sailing.

ASK VINNIE, the Former Volunteer



Dear Vinnie:

Ever live in a community with somebody who deliberately uses politically incorrect language just to get a rise out of housemates? When that doesn't work, he notches up the stakes and makes crude innuendoes or jokes. Two of us asked him to stop, but his response was: "You girls have a problem. No, you are the problem. What's the matter with you?" Any suggestions, Vinnie?

*Near the Edge in
Niagara, NY*

Dear Niagara,
Don't become his fall-guy. Use the healing power of strong statements that begin with "I." Say something like: I am offended (hurt, discounted) when I hear putdowns of minorities (housemates, women, etc.). Avoid statements that begin with "You" (e.g. You think, You act like...). Ignore his jibes. Reward him with your full attention only when he shares his real concerns, speaks from an "I" posture, and stops dragging his knuckles on the ground. -Vinnie

Dear Vinnie:

My community is like living in a zoo! The dishes pile up, the bathrooms are disgusting, our feet stick to the floor and there is a

constant stench in our common area. Chore wheels don't seem to help and I'm at my wit's end. What should I do?

Messy in Mesa, AZ

Dear Messy,
Have you asked your housemates about their priorities in terms of housekeeping? Try ranking each of the following activities on a scale of 1-5 (1 is the most important and 5 is the least). Then ask your housemates to do the same (you may want to add some of your own "issues").

- No clutter—anywhere
- Clean sink/ no dishes
- Clean bathrooms
- Clean common areas
- Living simply
- Eating meals together
- Shopping schedule



Discussing these responses may help you to understand what is important to each person and may help you figure out ways to compromise and motivate each other. For example: if you do the grocery shopping twice a month, someone else may agree to mop the floor in the bathroom. If that doesn't work, try renting a pig for the common area until people get the hint! - Vinnie

Dear Vinnie:

My faith is really important to me. When I joined this community, I expected everyone to be motivated to pray together, attend Mass as a group, and adhere to traditional Catholic values. I'm so disappointed at my housemates' "watered down" version of living in Christian community. I wish in our house we would live a more actively Catholic lifestyle. How can I show them what they're missing?

Praying Solo in Santiago



Dear Solo:

It's great that you enjoy living out your faith! However, not everyone expresses their faith in the same way. Have you ever tried talking with your housemates about what they consider holy, grace-filled, or spiritual experiences? The sacraments and traditional prayers are one way of worship; finding the sacred in the everyday (in music, nature, solitude) may be the approach your cronies take. Asking housemates to share their experiences and to define their different styles of prayer and faith is a great place to start. One way to show them your faith is living out the gospel values -- loving, respecting and accepting the members of your community. Remember: "there are many gifts, but the same Spirit..." - Vinnie

Ever Feel Like Your Boat Is Taking On Water?

There were these people fishing and at first having no success. At another's suggestion, they cast their nets elsewhere and caught so many fish their boat couldn't handle it and was nearly sinking.

Sometimes volunteers and missionaries are up to their knees in people's needs and requests. Although that's good, there can be too much of a good thing which leads to that sinking feeling.



Name anything weighing down your community life. What are ways you found to restore your personal buoyancy? That of your community? Read and discuss details of **John 21: 1-14**. Take a moment to break bread and look at your work and living situation from a new approach or a different perspective.

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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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