



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 Eight, Number Four

Seeing Is Changing

by Gibson Fay

Jesuit Volunteer Corps

There is no road.

"Traveler, there is no road, the road is made as one walks." Poet Antonio Machado

"What we see, we see, and seeing is changing." Poet Adrienne Rich

I hadn't expected to be the last to leave. I hadn't thought about leaving. Only one of two remaining in the area to continue work with my Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) placement (teaching adult education to 18-24 year-olds), it made sense that I locked up the house alone after a couple of days trying to be too busy to notice the extra space. The physical reminder and space holed-out in my thoughts and feelings were an early indication that, though we had shared our goodbyes on several occasions, I had just begun to grapple with the end of my year and absence of my fellow community members.

Whether your experience of community is the ideal of challenge and bonding or the feared cynical and alienating, the act of leaving will be filled with both life-giving and heart-wrenching memories of time spent together. The process of saying goodbye is a time to face personal and community successes and failures. Though I had said goodbye to my housemates and meant it, though we had laughed over our first impressions, changes over the year, and gifts given each other, though I had begun to consider, plan for, and anticipate my post-JVC days, I found myself closing the door to our home realizing my goodbyes and remembering had just begun.

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In this issue: Goodbyes and hellos!

As volunteers start finishing up their terms of service, this issue of *Shared Visions* covers different aspects of both saying goodbye and saying hello.

Formers **Alice** and **Gibson** share their experiences as they left their placements and explored life after full-time volunteer service.

Also inside are some **tips for your transition** (p.4) and opportunities for **jobs, networking and free publications** (pp. 5 & 6)!

Between Two Worlds

by Alice Hogan

Our Little Brothers and Sisters
(*Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos*)

I remember sitting on the front porch swing in the late summer of 1994. Physically, I was in one of my favorite childhood spots; in my mind, I was 3,000 miles away in a small town in rural Mexico surrounded by my favorite brown-faced munchkins. It was a strange sensation, like an out of body experience. I could see myself on the porch but I felt hollow on the inside, as if only my shell were swinging there. My heart was with a vastly different life in a place that now felt as distant as the moon.

Saying goodbye to the children at *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos* (NPH), a Mexican orphanage, was the hardest thing I have ever done. However after two years of living with and caring for these children, some from their earliest days of life, I was very tired. My emotional energy was depleted and my body exhausted. I needed serious rest and recovery from battling a variety of tropical pests.

Because I had gone to Mexico right after college, my re-entry was a two-fold process. Not only was I returning after two years of living abroad, I was also entering a new phase of adulthood, leaving student life behind. This made for a larger challenge than I expected. My head was full of questions about what to do with the rest of my life. What career options, relationships and community involvements would I pursue? All the while I thought of nothing but

"my kids" in Mexico and how much I missed them.

I felt enormous inner turmoil. Prayer

was a key factor in maintaining any sense of inner peace and calm. It seemed that few people understood what I was experiencing on the inside and I felt very alone, but I knew God had been with me throughout my time in Mexico. I turned to God for understanding and comfort and to try to make sense of this chaos and emotional upheaval.

God heard my prayers and sent support in the form of family and fellow former volunteers from my program, who helped me over the hump of re-entry. I spent countless hours on long-distance calls, working out feelings and

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Near the end of my year I began to deal with the ways in which those whom I met along the way had changed me, including my fellow roommates, hard-shelled clients, various support people, JVC staff, and stragglers. The changes were subtle. At some point, I realized that the mere seeing of my year had changed me. Each new image stacked on the next, if examined, revealed an ethical challenge, an emotional challenge, a political challenge, and a spiritual challenge. I did not decide to refuse a new salary at work or give away all my possessions and live in the wilderness. I did vow to sit down with my fiancée to discuss what things we need in our lives and which we can and must do without. As I considered each imprint from my year, I began to face the value of simplicity and need for community support, group action, and quiet spaces that those images told me to hold on to.

Collectively, both formally and informally, in twos, threes, and all five, my roommates and I also began, at some point, to share our seeing with each other. As August grew close, we shared how we saw ourselves changing and what each of us contributed to the house, whether it was political cynicism, smelly feet, frequent pizza, or challenging prayers. We acknowledged, slowly, that we were leaving each other, that our lives would never intersect in the same ways, that we would miss the laughter, support, and pain provided by each of us.

Sharing the changes we underwent was fun. Sharing the gifts and dirty dishes was easy. Not as easy was the mourning: the actual pursing of the lips to say goodbye. Looking forward to a new apartment and my fiancée joining me from the East Coast, it was easy for me to skip from acknowledging changes and sharing gifts to planning the year to come. There was no time to linger, to allow the leaving to disorient past, present, and future, to leave each of us gripping the worn edges of the three flea-ridden couches in the brown three-flat on Oakland Avenue. In the end, I'm not sure it mattered. The physicality of the quiet house brought all that feeling to my hand turning the lock.

One way I dealt with the sudden mourning and absence was to accompany my only remaining ex-roommate to the infamous Telegraph Ave. in Berkeley for an afternoon that ended up with our ears pierced. Stupid? Probably.

Painful? Definitely. But it was a way for us to mark our year as it had marked us. It was a physical emblem and a beginning. On some level, that wasn't entirely conscious, I started to think about how to incorporate into my coming days the lessons and memories from our year together working with the poor.

As weeks and months passed, I began to understand that one good way to remember the year in JVC was to keep living its vital lessons, feelings and values. My fiancée and

I found a culturally and socioeconomically diverse, authentic church community to begin contributing to. I was lucky enough to have a network of former JVs, friends, and current volunteers who didn't mind me blathering on about the nicknames of a particular client or how cold the water was during

our community camping trip at Big Sur River. I was challenged by planning and deciding with my fiancée what we would and wouldn't have (no TV). I struggled, as always, to make space for quiet, to find time to add my voice to community politics and protests in a cacophony of bills, graduate school decisions, parents' advice, already rich college friends, and all the other busyness which our lives often demand.

Almost a year now after those goodbyes, after closing the doors of Casa Thea Bowman for next year's community, I am still affected by the layers of memory from my year with JVC. I still find that the best way for me to hold those memories is to let them breathe in the present: to discuss with my fiancée how a truckload of wedding gifts could weigh us down even as they make life easier, to decide whether San Francisco housing protests or the coming Oakland mayor's race deserves more attention, to continue asking myself how I am affected by working part-time for a giant corporate bookseller and acknowledge what that work has taught me, to find unexpected morning hours in the Oakland Hills listening to bay trees bend. We demonstrate how much we value our goodbyes, our year of service as a whole, when we let them shape our present and future days. I still have the impulsive earring and sometimes its infection. I may keep it or not depending on my mood. I will always know where it is. I will always reach for it. +

"The process of saying goodbye is a time to face personal and community successes and failures."

Reflection questions for Gibson's article

Gibson quoted a poet that "we see, and seeing is changing." He then helped us see scenes from the end of his year, his good-byes, and the beginning of his remembering the year's easy and difficult times.

1. If you could have a snapshot of one work-scene which captures something important about your placement site, describe that photo.
2. If you could have another photo of either your

volunteer community members or other significant people from your volunteer experience, describe what's happening.

3. Gibson did not throw away his possessions to live in the wilderness, nor take to an extreme the lessons from his year; he did reflect on how to take the lessons with him in a balanced way. Which lessons, values and feelings have changed or have been affected over the course of your experience? How can these add balance to your life?
4. Is there a "difficult" goodbye you need to make? If so, what *small* steps can you take and which activities or gatherings can you plan to help prepare for this goodbye?

experiences with formers who had just been through the same process months before. Those conversations gave me hope that I would make it through this particularly painful time and I was reminded that "this too shall pass." God was providing for me, like countless other times, and I was keenly aware of it.

I spent time reflecting on my experiences and thinking about my options. Almost every day I wrote in my journal and it was a wonderful outlet for my varied emotions. It felt safe to express any feelings or dreams, not having to try to explain them to anyone.

Journaling was a private space to be with myself and to share myself with God.

There were moments of despair and loneliness, deep feelings of loss and displacement. I tried to remember all the blessings I had. I was thankful that I was able to go to Mexico at all and to have so many wonderful experiences. I tried to look on my current situation as a real opportunity for me and as a gift from God. I accepted it as a time for

self-enrichment and deeper self-knowledge. I was being molded even more actively into the person I was to become. And, although I found the process painful and confusing at times, I felt like the clay in the Potter's hands: I was being held all the while.

When I left NPH I promised the kids I would return to visit in six months. Having made that

commitment, I knew I wasn't letting them go forever and would see them soon. I was able to turn my attention to my own life. If I could incorporate some of

what I came to love about Mexican people and culture, it would surely enrich my life here at home.

Speaking Spanish was something I had become accustomed to in Mexico and it brought me a lot of joy. I also knew I wanted to do direct service work and having spent so much time with children, I knew I would need to

get my "kid fix" if not in my job, then at least on a volunteer basis. I began volunteering at a free clinic as a

translator. That position became a part-time job. Working part-time was perfect for me since I needed time to regain my health and to reintegrate.

Being part of a supportive church community was also a priority. I found a multicultural Catholic church that worked for social justice issues that I believed in.

It took over a year to settle into American life. My first return visit to Mexico helped me tremendously. I realized the children will always be a part of my life. I carry them in my heart: we have changed each other forever.

As I sit on the front porch almost four years later, I am not in the "crisis mode" I felt in those first months of re-entry. However, my career discernment and search for meaning continue - it is a dynamic process as I integrate my experiences and discern God's plan for my life. I see it as an unfolding process, an opportunity to be creative and positive, filling my once "hollow" shell with a rich mix of past experiences and on-going adventures. +

"I felt like the clay in the Potter's hands: I was being held all the while."

"Journaling was a private space to be with myself and to share myself with God."

main dishes

LOCAL CULINARY SECRETS!

Write out some of the traditional cultural meals from the region where you are volunteering.

Gather a selection of recipes from housemates or neighbors.

Make your favorite dishes for family and friends as they look at your pictures and album. Cook them for yourself as comfort food to remember your experience!



Reflection questions for Alice's article

1. Upon her return to the U.S., Alice said she had many questions about career, relationships and community involvement. As you think about concluding your volunteer service, what questions demand your attention?
2. Alice found that prayer was a strong support for keeping her inner peace amid the emotional upheaval. Where is God for you during this process of re-entry? Write a prayer for yourself or for your community.
3. Alice found that one way of holding onto her volunteer experience was to incorporate into her life some of what she came to love about the Mexican culture. What are some of the aspects of your service year(s) that you have come to love and want to carry with you?
4. Journaling and connecting with formers were ways Alice unpacked her experience. Identify outlets or people you know who could help your transition. Ask current and former volunteers what their resources are/were.

Saying Goodbye

a departure reflection by **Georgine Vickerd**,
a former volunteer with Scalabrinian Missionaries in Mexico

Angél
i know you are sad
to see me go
but i did not come
to say good-bye
i came for you
to know you
so that you
may know yourself
a little better...

...after today
i will look for you
in the faces of
strangers
i will remember
your troubled smile
carry you
in my heart
until we meet again

i did not come
to say good-bye
i came
so that you might find
the courage
to dream
to love

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what's Next?



Don't know where to START?

Ask your volunteer program for a copy of the **"What's Next?" Notebook**. This Notebook helps guide your transition after volunteer service, with suggestions for your next steps -- whatever they may be! If your program doesn't have a copy, they can contact our office and we'll mail them one right away for duplicating and distributing!

Need a JOB?

Sign up to receive the Pallotti Center's free job listings from our **Job Bank** for former volunteers. Call, write or email Alice Hogan at the address below to receive a monthly job packet for the areas where you are searching for employment.

Looking for SUPPORT when you move?

Join the **Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners!** Already, 500 "formers" have agreed to be available for people like YOU! Whether you are moving to a new area or going home, meet formers who live there and who may be interested in helping people like yourself find employment or affordable areas to live, or get together for different social and spiritual activities! Call or write another former in your new area...someone who has already been through all this. Ask your program for a form and the lists.

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TOOLS FOR TRANSITIONING

It's important to take care of yourself during this transition time. Make sure you spend as much time as you need reflecting and processing your volunteer experience. Don't feel rushed to take the first job offer you see. Take your time saying your goodbyes and make time to say hello to whatever lies ahead. Here are some tips for this transition period:

Tell "your story"

Names, faces, places and souvenirs! Put together a book or album that reflects your volunteer experience. Fill it with quotes, facts, pictures, postcards, or anything meaningful to share with family and friends.

Rituals and reflection

Ritualize some of your goodbyes with a party, liturgy, prayer or poem. Add candles or music. Try being really present to those around you.

Anticipate others' reactions

Expect changes in relationships. Be forgiving of apparent disinterest-- there may be reasons for it-- it does NOT reflect you personally. Expected changes are always less stressful than unexpected ones.

Network

Commit to keeping in touch with your housemates, your program and people you worked with. Contact friends you've been away from to rekindle ties. Remain open to new friends and contacts along this new journey.

Spirituality

Spirituality nourishes friendships and intimacy with God, others and self. Describe some volunteer experiences which have influenced or supported your faith. What role can your spirituality or faith play in this time of transition?

Integrate values

What are ways you can carry with you from here the new or re-inforced values from this experience?

Top fives

Share your "Top 5" with your community. Ask each other your Top 5 quotes heard during the year, strangest things that happened, best times, meals, etc. Be creative!

Include time

Include time for yourself in your daily plans! A healthy transition is one that addresses your own needs in the balance of exercise, eating right, resting, prayer time, sharing with others and patience during the process.

Orient new volunteers

Leave resources for the volunteers coming in after you. Put together quotes, words of wisdom, menus or reading suggestions! Draw maps to your favorite cheap eats, parks or sights.

Now...

Living in the present allows you to balance memories from your volunteer service with stress or anxiety you may be feeling about saying goodbye and moving into a new phase. Enjoy each day!



Staying Connected



COMING SOON! The Pallotti Center is offering a NEW publication, *Staying Connected*, that will be out later this year for former volunteers, like YOU! It will feature articles by formers on issues like integrating your volunteer experience into your life and living simply in a consumer society. Would you like to receive this FREE publication? Please fill out this form and mail it to us: The Pallotti Center, Box 893-Cardinal Station, Washington, DC 20064.

Name: _____

Permanent Address: _____

(NOT your volunteer house, please) _____

Volunteer Program: _____

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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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