



# Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers presented by  
the Saint Vincent Pallotti Centers  
— The people who bring you Connections —

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Volume Nine, Number Four

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For many volunteers, this is a time of closure and good-byes as their program wraps up. We hope you find these activities helpful at this time. God bless you on this journey.

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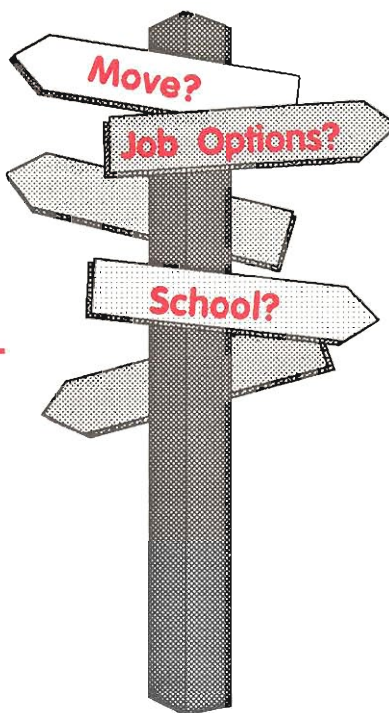
## Finding Myself -- In Solidarity by Jim Baker CRISPAZ (Christians for Peace)

Through most of college, I'd been looking forward to living abroad as a solidarity worker. Coming home to the US was something I was much less prepared to do. On one hand, I had had this amazing, empowering experience—I had helped set up a metalshop benefiting peasant farmers in El Salvador! On the other hand I was

back in Ohio with a vague Latin American studies degree, and my college friends had all moved away. I was not quite sure who I was going to be in this life back in the US.

In El Salvador, I muddled through a lot of idyllic expectations about volunteering and Central America. I had envisioned helping these noble people, and of course found myself working with real people. The people around me in El Salvador had many of the same qualities (everything from noble to disgraceful) as the people I'd known back in Ohio. Coming home, I had expectations to overcome as well. I figured it would be easy to integrate my volunteer self into post-grad life in America.

*continued on page 2*



## Privileged to be There... and Here by Stephanie Nichols Red Cloud Volunteers

*I walk to the “bus barn” and hear the snow crunch beneath my feet. As the cold crisp South Dakota air touches my face, I feel alive and ready to begin the day. After fifteen minutes of warming up the school bus, I embark on my route which will bring 65 children to school in one of the most remotely isolated places in the country, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. As I make my way across the reservation, the rising sun glistens off the morning frost that blankets these beautiful hills, and once again, I'm reminded that I'm privileged to be here.*

alarm clock and prepare to live another day trying to exist in Corporate America working for one of the largest oil companies in the world.

My days now consist of living in the hub of activity in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a city 5,000 miles from my home in Alaska. When I feel the weight of transitioning from my volunteer year while trying to make sense of the stark socioeconomic differences that exist in this country, I often retreat to one of the only things I still find familiar, that of quiet and prayer. During these times of quiet, away from the

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I got an apartment in my hometown with a nice guy whom I didn't really know. My roommate was only there 2 or 3 nights a week, which left me a lot of time to myself. I cleaned the apartment and pondered what I would do with myself. As I scrubbed the linoleum, I struggled with the loss of a dating relationship that had crumbled during months apart. As I dusted shelves, I tried to reconcile my lack of emotional connection to traditional religion with my attraction to its structure and depth. As I swept the stairwell, I meditated on my future identity. Should I try to live outside the system? Sell out? Find something in between?

To pay rent, I got a job doing house calls servicing water systems. I maintained water purifier systems for people who could spend an extra three hundred dollars on pure water. This was an abrupt splash into "unconscientized" Midwestern America. The van only had AM radio, so I was welcomed home by the likes of Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy. Life was certainly very different back in the States! In some ways, I felt as if I were the antithesis of the self I had been abroad.

I looked for small ways to try to step back into the identity I had created for myself in college:

solidarity worker. I volunteered at a local homeless shelter and with the local literacy project in off hours. But I felt I had lost track of my dream. I felt like I had the desire to do things for people in need, but not the skills. It seemed poignant to me that while abroad many of the internationals I hung out with had been health professionals.

Four years and one nursing degree later, I have no regrets about how things have turned out. I live with an old college buddy (also a former volunteer) in a low-income Latino neighborhood in Chicago. I work at a clinic for the local population, and sometimes volunteer spare time at various health-related projects. I hang out mostly with other ex-volunteer types, but no

longer feel entirely alienated from the "mainstream." I no longer feel like I'm exclusively a solidarity worker. Nursing school put me in a debt situation which will keep me from any long-term commitments abroad for a while, but I view this as a necessary trade-off. I've had to make other trade-offs, as well, letting go of some of the ideology that I used to base my service work on, and have come to find less internally dissonant ways to fulfill my spiritual needs. The logic is circular, but now I find that my most important reason for staying involved in solidarity work is that it helps make me who I want to be. †

*"I have no regrets  
about how things have  
turned out."*

### Questions for Jim's article:

1. Upon return, Jim struggled with personal relationships, spirituality and identity. Name your struggles and fears as you approach your departure. Write a short prayer about each one that you can reflect on over the upcoming weeks and months.
2. Jim began his journey as a "solidarity worker" and years later extended this identity to become a health care provider. During your time of volunteer service, how has your self-image shifted? Finish this sentence: Two areas of personal growth which I hope to develop in the future are....
3. Jim talked about the trade-offs he has made in areas of career, spirituality, finances, housing, relationships, further education and attitude. As you consider the first few months of post-volunteer life, in what areas are you willing to make trade-offs? In what areas do you feel you can't compromise at this time?
4. Consider your next career move. Make a list of 5 dream jobs you could do upon return. Be imaginative! Now sift out common traits, tasks or skills from the job list. What do these trends tell you about your own interests, abilities and dreams?

dessert

### Say it with Sweets!

Use your favorite local dessert recipe (with ingredients you can access) to show your gratitude to those you've worked with or met this year.



Give cookies or other treats, using chips, nuts, or fruit to spell a thank you message on top.

Or accompany your tasty gift with a list of the things you're grateful for in that person (e.g. These 10 treats represent these 10 things I thank you for....).

**It's a creative, heart-felt and tasty way to express your feelings!**

city's activities, I realize that as I live in the "uncomfortable," in a new city, stripped of most everything I've known, I'm drawn out of myself and pulled toward those values and insights that were confirmed as I lived my volunteer year. I trust that eventually these experiences will help call me into the work I am meant to do.

In the meantime, I've found it is critical that I continue my service and involvement within the community whether it be helping with the recent tornado disaster in Oklahoma City or volunteering at a non-profit clinic here in Tulsa. I've also sought out and made time to participate in many other life-giving activities such as playing basketball on a women's team, taking art classes at a local university, and running at the end of the work day. It's at these times that I'm able to

retreat back on my time on the reservation, my time as a volunteer, the time when I discovered a way of life and environment where I felt

comfortable and "at home."

As difficult as these past several months have been, I know I'm progressing in making some sense of my volunteer

experiences. I allow those times to resonate within my life and my work

as I move toward a more service-oriented career. I know that I've been removed from the "comfortable," where the next step in life, until now,

has been somewhat predetermined. In high school the presumed next step was college, from college I moved into volunteer work, from volunteer work and into this job. It is now that I am forced to reexamine

the plethora of possibilities that exist as I create my life.

When I wake up longing for those times back in Pine Ridge, sharing unique experiences with people who will remain special friends, living simply and also completely, I am grateful for the memories of those early morning bus routes when the only thing between me and the smiles of children as they board the bus for the start of another day, is a sacred land warming

beneath the presence of a beautiful sunrise. I know that even if life on the reservation can currently be no physically closer than the memories in my mind, I am grateful to

remember my time there -- times that will forever continue to shape my view of the world and how I live my life. †

***"I'm... pulled toward those values and insights... (I experienced) as I lived my volunteer year."***

***"... my times there (on the reservation)... will forever continue to shape my view of the world and how I live my life."***

### Questions for Stephanie's article:

1. During difficult or taxing moments, Stephanie retreated to quiet time and prayer to establish a personal balance. List ways you can incorporate quiet time and prayer into your days now. Where are some "safe places" where you can retreat and reflect on your volunteer experience? How can you take these ideas of maintaining a spiritual balance with you during your post-volunteer transition(s)?
2. As Stephanie discovered, there are advantages to experiencing the realm of the "uncomfortable" and to feeling its impact. Describe both the uncomfortable and comfortable aspects of your volunteer year(s). What positive aspects have unfolded for you because you experienced these "uncomfortable" circumstances?
3. Stephanie felt "at home" with the way of life she discovered at Pine Ridge, and again in Oklahoma by participating in activities, hobbies and volunteering. What are some of the ways you enrich your daily life that will help you feel "at home" regardless of where you go?
4. There's a privilege in every situation, as Stephanie discovered while serving at Pine Ridge. What privileges are you newly aware of this year? How will your life be different because of this awareness?



***Life is for the Living!  
And living is an  
experience in growth and  
unfoldment.  
It is not so important  
what happens around us  
or even to us.  
What counts is  
what happens in us.***

*-Eric Butterworth*



# Tips for the Journey



## Create a Treasure Chest Full of:

### **Mementos**

Build up a treasure chest of postcards, pictures, recipes, mementos, etc. from the area where you are serving. Don't forget to "capture" the people you know by gathering their recipes and stories of their lives and cultural rituals.

### **Memories**

Start selecting key memories that you can share with family and friends back home or wherever you are traveling.

### **Thank You's**

Before you go, take the time to identify people or groups who have touched your life, and design a simple way of saying "thanks."

### **Good-byes**

Decide ahead of time *how* you want to say good-bye to your community, co-workers & the people you served. Early planning will ease the strains of your departure and help you to better express how you feel.



## Follow Your Inner Road Map:

### **Feeling**

Allow yourself to feel a gamut of emotions all at the same time, if necessary! Make sure you take time to process your experience.

### **Balancing**

Strive for balance, especially during the rough times of transition. Exercise, eat healthily, make time to be social and to reflect... all these will help you have a smoother transition!

### **Telling**

Find ways to "tell your story" to friends and family back home and even to potential interviewers. Come up with a good 30 second version of your experience, a 2 minute version and then a 60 minute version with food and pictures!

### **Praying**

Don't forget to tell your story to God, too! Pray for those you've left behind and for yourself during this time of change.



## Making Companions on the Journey:

### **Bring Yourself**

You don't have to let go of everything! Discern how to translate the values of your volunteer experience into your actions and choices of today.

### **Socialize**

Remember, re-entry can be difficult. You are not the only person feeling this way! Find out if there are other former volunteers in your area and see if you can organize a gathering.

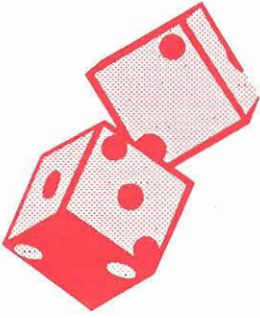
### **Share**

Go to your college to talk to potential volunteers or speak at your parish about your experience. Also talk to your program about being a contact for interested volunteers.

### **Speak Out**

Become a *voice for the voiceless* in whatever way you can. Reflect on the oppressions that you have witnessed. In what ways can you advocate for others? How can you find new outlets to put your love into action?

# Yadda... Yadda... "YATZEE!"



Talking with your housemates at this point in the year may seem like a Seinfeld episode-- yadda yadda yadda. With the help of dice and guided questions, we want to help you turn your conversation into a "Yatzee"-- where every roll and every answer is a winner!

Take turns rolling a die. Depending on the number you roll, answer the corresponding number below. If you have already answered that one, roll again. All of the answers should be based on your year(s) as a full-time volunteer. Have fun!

## If you roll a...

- 1: *Share one of the initial expectations and reactions you had upon arrival. Looking back, how have these proven true or false?*
- 2: *What was one of the most difficult things you dealt with that has challenged you or stretched you?*
- 3: *Name three skills you acquired or honed that can benefit your life skills and your resume.*
- 4: *What is one spiritual insight you have learned from the people with whom you served?*
- 5: *Recount a story of success or hope that you witnessed.*
- 6: *Six months from now, what do you hope to have incorporated into your life from your volunteer experience?*

## ARE YOU FINISHING UP YOUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM?

### 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. Contact Alice Hogan at the address, email or phone numbers listed below to receive a monthly job packet for the areas in which you are searching for employment.

### Looking for SUPPORT when you move?

Join the **Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners!** Already, 600 "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 getting 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.



### Want to stay CONNECTED to this experience?

**Staying Connected** is our newest publication specifically for "former" volunteers to stay in touch with the values and ideas encountered through volunteer service. It is our vision that this will help bring former volunteers together, serving as an impetus for personal growth and spiritual reflection and as a forum for discussion. Sign up now for this free publication!

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## **Biblical Reflection: The Power of Memory... to Unite and Transform**



Volunteers and former volunteers often struggle to keep alive their friendships, values and ideals. Our writers Stephanie and Jim illustrated this: Stephanie struggled to stay connected by remembering her school children and Jim struggled to reconnect with his dream and to serve those in need. Their efforts to unite their past memories, present needs and future hopes were central to becoming who they felt called to be.

This challenge is an ancient one which the Old Testament Jewish traditions also addressed. For the Jews, Jesus' ancestors, to remember someone or to celebrate an event such as the Exodus was more than a recalling. It was a berakoth (Hebrew for making present a person or object

from the past), a re-membering, a re-living of the person and event, beyond earthly limitations, in the mind of God.

By urging us to "Do this in memory of me," spoken at his Last Supper (1 Cor.11:23ff; Mark 14:22ff; Luke 22:19f), Jesus invited us to celebrate the Eucharist and thereby to open the door to unite with our loved ones, past and present, transforming our lives in profound ways.

Which memories or stories from your volunteer experience do you want to keep present in your mind? In what ways, for you, is remembering your loved ones a form of prayer? A communion with the body of Christ?

## ***Shared Visions***

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Volume 9, Number 4

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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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