

SHARED VISIONS

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— A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers — presented by the people who bring you **Connections** —

A Different Kind of March Madness

During Lent, all Christians are called to reflect on our lives and prepare for the miracle of the Resurrection. In the beginning of your mission experience, you probably spent most of your time and energy learning and adjusting: learning about your program and the people it serves, adjusting to living in a new place, learning about fellow volunteers and other co-workers.

Over time, the pace of that learning tends to slow. Like the basketball player who has mastered dribbling, passing, boxing out and other fundamentals, most of you are now ready to perform your daily tasks and carry out your mission work with zeal.

While there are always new things to discover and experience as a volunteer, you can also expect to develop some comfort with your work and your community.

At this point, you may feel that you have mastered “the basics” of



being a lay missionary and you might be looking for some new challenges. Also, as hard as it can be to believe, you may already be looking toward

your post-volunteer life: what are you going to do next?

In this issue of *Shared Visions*, we focus on the Theological Reflection piece of the Pastoral Circle. Just as we began the year with Experience and moved onto Analysis, the third step in the circle ensures that we do not confine our social analysis to the secular world. In this step we reflect using the framework of theology and Church teaching that have been handed down to us. With that in mind, this edition focuses on the Triduum traditions of Veneration of the Cross and The Washing of the Feet. We also examine how to maintain values of simple living during Lent and continue to grow in faith with one another. Finally, we review James Cone’s latest book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, which examines the correlation between the crucifixion of Christ and the lynching of African-Americans in the Jim Crow period.

Simple Lenten Living

Lent is a great time to take a step back and reflect on many different aspects of our lives as volunteers. One particular value we can focus on during Lent is simple living. No matter where you are in terms of your living experience as a volunteer, you can always reflect on how you are doing and challenge yourself to dig deeper and rededicate yourself to this value.

In keeping with the Pastoral Circle, it is important to reflect theologically on what we are doing. In Matthew 6: 19-21, Jesus says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus tells us to not

focus on our worldly possessions because they are fleeting, but instead, to focus on what cannot go away: our relationships with ourself, with others, and with God. During Lent, as Catholics, we are challenged to pray, fast and give alms. This allows us an opportunity to grow closer to God.

As a volunteer in a Catholic program, you have a special opportunity to take these three tasks to a deeper level because you are in a position to examine praying, fasting and giving alms through the lens of your experience as a volunteer who is living simply for this year or more of service. Most people do not have the opportunity to accompany those most in need, create structural change, work for the Church, See **LIVING** pg. 6.



Triduum Traditions: Foot Washing

As we leave Lent behind in early April and enter into the Triduum (the “Three Days” from Holy Thursday night to sundown on Easter Sunday), we hear a familiar story from the Gospel of John. While the other Gospel writers are concerned with the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, John recounts a different story of humble service and radical discipleship.

During the meal before the Passover feast, Jesus ties a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin, and stoops low to wash and dry the feet of his disciples. Peter objects, believing that this act is far too humiliating to expect from the Lord. Jesus sets him straight, and then Peter, in his exuberance, asks to be washed from head to toe.

Let us spend some time reflecting on a few questions that emerge from this story. Where else in our Christian experience is water used to cleanse? Is this story a lesson only for leaders or for all believers? What exactly does Jesus show us to do in this story?

Water is a common sacramental. It is present in many of our rituals beyond Holy Thursday. At each Eucharistic celebration, water mingled with wine becomes part of the Eucharistic presence of Christ. A priest washes his hands before consecrating the Eucharist, praying silently for God to forgive his unworthiness to celebrate the sacrament. All of us bless ourselves with holy water on our way in and out of church. We might even keep a bottle of holy water in our community homes. But nowhere is water more central to the celebration than in the sacrament of baptism, when the minister pours water on the forehead of the baptized. It is a moment of new life for the baptized, worthy of a fresh white garment to symbolize purity and new life in Christ. Yet it is also a mini-death, a journey through the tomb to the Resurrection, which can be recognized so clearly in churches that use full immersion baptismal pools. So the bath that Jesus talks about with his disciples at the Last Supper is an allusion to the death that He will soon endure and the Resurrection that will follow.

Some observers point out that this story is intended to show the humility with which leaders should act. Jesus was the leader of his disciples and yet he stooped low to wash their feet. Likewise, on Holy Thursday priests and bishops around the world will also be the ones to carry out this act in imitation of what Jesus did for his friends at the Last Supper. So there might be some tendency to think that only the leaders among us are being called out at the end of this Gospel story. Are they the only ones who should also perform this act of radical service? As Catholics spending a year or more out of our lives in volunteer service, we know better. Jesus’ message is for all. Indeed, even the poor whom we serve are called to act in this way. Perhaps you know of an older woman in your community who has been called on to raise not just her own children but her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well. Or a homeless man who volunteers to clean up the soup kitchen after the evening meal is served, wiping down tables and taking out the trash. This story would certainly have special meaning for them as another Lent comes to an end.

Finally, what exactly should we be expected to do after hearing this story? Washing the feet of our friends and neighbors is not enough. Jesus’ example does not end there. It continues on Good Friday – on Calvary, on a cross. We are called to go to our crucifixion with Jesus as well, to go all the way with him even to an ignominious death. And that is what brings us to the Veneration of the Cross, which we will discuss on page four.

Community Reflection

Catholic Relief Services' Lenten Program, called Operation Rice Bowl, offers us much to reflect upon during this Lenten Season. Below is a format from CRS that you can use for a Lenten community reflection.

1. Gather as a small faith community in preparation for Lent.
2. Have one person read an excerpt from the "Prayer of Jesus" (John 17: 20-24) aloud. Quietly reflect on the reading. After a few minutes allow people to share their reflections.
3. Ask each person in the group to read aloud, one at a time, a principle of Catholic Social Teaching from CRS (see below).
4. After listening carefully to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), use the following questions for discussion:
 - What is Jesus trying to communicate in this reading? What relationship do you see between the Father and Son that can be emulated in our own experience?
 - How does the reading from John's Gospel challenge you? How do the principles of CST challenge you?
5. Ask everyone to choose a CST theme and challenge them to reflect on this theme throughout Lent.

For more Lenten resources and information about CRS and Operation Rice Bowl, visit www.crs.org and <http://orb.crs.org>

Catholic Social Teaching

Definitions from Catholic Relief Services

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) - The body of thought and work from the Catholic Church that addresses the social situations we face in our ever-changing world.

Summary of Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Relief Services' faith and mission call us to work for justice, serve those in need, pursue peace, and work toward the full realization of the dignity and rights of our sisters and brothers around the world. At the heart of Catholic Relief Services' commitment is a set of principles, a body of thought, and a call to action known as Catholic Social Teaching.

During the past 100 years, papal statements, Vatican II and regional Conferences of Bishops worldwide have addressed urgent issues which have both national and international implications - such as human rights, economic depression, development, political participation, and war and peace. These messages are not only Church doctrine, but also provide individuals with a framework for action. Catholic Social Teaching calls people everywhere, and of every faith, to work toward the elimination of poverty, to speak out against injustices, and to actively shape a more peaceful and just world. Following is a brief summary of some of the main themes in Catholic Social Teaching that also relate directly to the work of CRS.

Dignity and Equality of the Human Person

All of humanity has been created in the image of God and possesses a basic dignity and equality that come directly from our Creator and not from any action on our own part.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has basic rights and responsibilities that flow from our human dignity and that belong to us as humans, regardless of any social or political structures. The rights are numerous and include those things that make life truly human. Corresponding to our rights are duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good of all.

Social Nature

All of us are social by nature and are called to live in community with others --- our full human potential isn't realized in solitude, but in community with others. How we organize our families, societies and communities directly affects human dignity and our ability to achieve our full human potential.

The Common Good

In order for all of us to have an opportunity to grow and develop fully, a certain social fabric must exist within society. This is the common good. Numerous social conditions -- economic, political, material and cultural - impact our ability to realize our human dignity and reach our full potential.

Subsidiarity

A higher level of government -- or organization -- should not perform any function or duty that can be handled more effectively at a lower level by people who are closer to the problem and have a better understanding of the issue. Likewise, institutions should not co-opt tasks that individuals can do alone.

Solidarity

We are all part of one human family -- whatever our national, racial, religious, economic or ideological differences - and in an increasingly interconnected world, loving our neighbor has global dimensions.

Preferential Option for the Poor

In every economic, political and social decision, a weighted concern must be given to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. When we do this we strengthen the entire community, because the powerlessness of any member wounds the rest of society. See **REFLECTION** pg. 4



Prepare the Way of the Cross

On Good Friday, the one day of the year when Mass is not celebrated, the Church gathers in silence for a solemn celebration of the Lord's Passion. Shortly after hearing this account of the death of Jesus Christ from the Gospel of John, a cross is brought forward to the sanctuary and an annual ritual is renewed. Everyone in the church comes forward and offers some act of veneration – a kiss, a genuflection or a bow – to the cross. Let's reflect on this ritual from our perspective as full-time volunteers.

As Christian members of a sinful, broken humanity, we are called to pick up our cross and walk with it to our worldly death. Throughout history, as James Cone's *Theology of the Cross* indicates, this has meant a physical death for unjustly oppressed people. It also means a spiritual death to worldly values that results in the discovery of a "vocation in downward mobility," as the late Jesuit priest Dean Brackley described. This vocation leads us to identify more with the crucified than the crucifiers as we begin to live the teachings of Christ and the values of Catholic Social Teaching as described on the previous page.

While people often speak of our individual vices and pet sins as crosses to be borne, we also must acknowledge our complicit behavior in the structural sins present in society as a whole. Dom Helder Camara described the reaction of society to injustice this way: "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist." Similarly, the Catholic Worker Movement has developed the language of hospitality (to reflect basic responses to social sin such as feeding the poor) and resistance (to reflect a challenge to the status quo, such as asking political leaders why the poor have no food). No Christian life is complete without incorporating hospitality and resistance in equal measure.

Returning to the Cross, this instrument of torture and death, and then venerating it is no mere Passion play. The power of the largely silent ritual lies in the fact that in a brief encounter of grace, we pause to recall all of our sufferings that Jesus took upon Himself by His willingness to suffer and die the death of a common criminal. We come forward to ponder a symbol of ignominy that Christ transformed into a symbol of triumph. Notice that the ritual is called the Veneration of the Cross rather than veneration of the crucifix. The corpus is not present. Even on Good Friday, our ritual actions foreshadow our Easter hope.

One Jesuit parish in the Washington, D.C. area has a long-standing tradition of engaging in the Veneration of the Cross at the very end of the Good Friday liturgy. While the appropriateness of this change can be debated, there are at least two positive outcomes that have been observed over the years. In some settings, the Veneration of the Cross proceeds at the rapid pace of a communion line, exacerbated by the occasional practice of using more than one cross. Not so at this church. Rather, veneration continues for a solid hour after the liturgy is complete. It becomes a time of great reverence, and that is certainly the intent of the ritual. The other interesting element is that the cross used is an enormous, heavy beam that is supported by no stand. Rather, parishioners take turns supporting the horizontal beam while others venerate the cross. After venerating, some stand off to the sides ready to take their turn bearing the burden of the cross of Christ. None of this is ever scripted or scheduled. After years of doing this, the people just seem to know that those strong enough to keep the cross elevated will be needed.

While we may not experience the ritual in exactly the same way, let us enter into Veneration of the Cross this Good Friday knowing that in many ways the strength and compassion we offer to others during this year or more of service does help many people carry their particular crosses in life. Your ministry is like the hands supporting the horizontal beam of that enormously heavy cross.

REFLECTION (from pg. 3)
Stewardship/Care for Creation

There is an inherent integrity to all of creation and it requires careful stewardship of all our resources, ensuring that we use and distribute them justly and equitably --- as well as planning for future generations.

"Beautiful is the moment in which we understand that we are no more than an instrument of God; we live only as long as God wants us to live; we can only do as much as God makes us able to do; we are only as intelligent as God would have us be." - Archbishop Oscar Romero

Book Review:

The Cross and the Lynching Tree

In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James Cone writes of the direct relationship between a 1st century lynching in the Holy Land and 20th century lynching practiced in the United States.

“The cross and the lynching tree interpret each other,” Cone writes. “Both were public spectacles, shameful events, instruments of punishment reserved for the most despised people in society. Any genuine theology and any genuine preaching of the Christian gospel must be measured against the test of the scandal of the cross and the lynching tree.” (161)

Cone begins his latest book with a brief history of lynching, which occurred throughout the United States, but did not become popular until after the Civil War, when blacks were no longer slaves and therefore had no value as property.

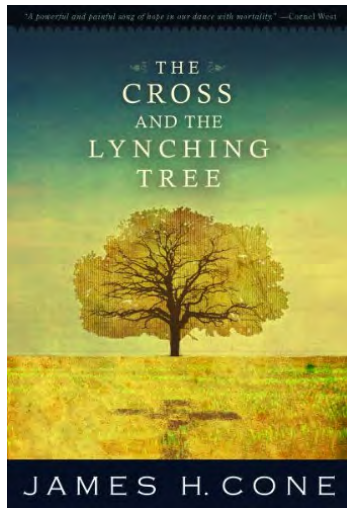
He then goes on to examine a theology of the cross through the writings of prominent 20th century American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Cone treats the unification of the Cross of Christ and the lynching of African-Americans as found in the work of black artists and writers such as Langston Hughes, James Baldwin and Billie Holiday, as well as female Civil Rights leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer.

Peppered throughout the work are personal reflections from Cone: how scared he was when his father didn't return from work on time,

how hard it was for the author's family members to maintain dignity in the face of oppression.

Central to Cone's work on race,



culture and religion found in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is a question regarding Cone's own life and work. How can a poor boy from rural Arkansas rise to become a distinguished professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York?

How does the reality of Cone's (and his people's) “making it” out of the brutality of racial oppression and poverty relate to the vanishing historical memory regarding the lynching of African-Americans in United States history?

At its heart, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* seems to be a preemptive strike against historical amnesia. Cone gives the reader plenty of examples of “black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze.”

Unlike much scholarly work, which tends to eschew passion in favor of cold analysis, one can tell that Cone the man is deeply af-

fectured by his race and his work.

The Cross and the Lynching Tree is a valuable book in that it sheds light on the unspoken historical and theological perspective on which our country is built.

One only needs to recall the backlash of middle-class white America to angry racial statements made by President Barack Obama's former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, during the 2008 election cycle to understand that the most segregated hour in the United States still occurs on Sunday morning.

Cone's work will be a valuable asset to not only volunteers but anyone working in ministry seeking to understand the relationship between race, class and oppression that continues to exist in our society today.

For more information on James Cone as well as the relationship between the cross and the lynching tree, view the author's 2007 interview with Bill Moyers at <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11232007/profile.html>

*Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black body swinging in the Southern
breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!*

*Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.*

-Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit.”

LIVING (from pg. 1).

live in an intentional community, and develop their spirituality like you have the opportunity to do during this year or more of service.

These six weeks of Lent are an ideal time to refocus your energy around simple living.

- Don't eat meat for the entire forty days not just on Fridays.
- Limit your use of technology.
- Spend time with a community member or neighbor you do not know that well.
- Pray the rosary or spend a part of every day in prayer or in reflection on your life and relationship with God.
- Take part in any Lenten reflection opportunities the church in your community offers.
- Start spiritual direction, if you have not done so already.
- Save \$5 from your living stipend every week and donate that money to the organization where you work or some other cause that is dear to your heart.
- Learn about a new social justice issue.
- Raise money or resources for a local soup kitchen, domestic violence center, or homeless shelter.

No matter what you decide to do this Lent, be sure to take the time to reflect on what you are doing, why you are doing it and how this can make you a better person. If you live in community, work together with your community members to support and encourage each other's work during Lent. Cherish these forty days of growth and challenge and look forward to the Resurrection and how much you will develop as a volunteer, an employee, a community member and a Christian.

Shared Visions

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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

Our goal is to promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church, and to support lay volunteers before, during, and after their term of service. The Center takes its 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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