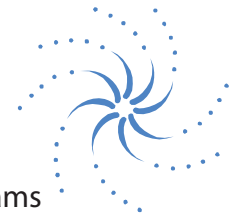




Staying Connected



a publication designed for alumni of Catholic full-time volunteer programs
brought to you by the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

Volume 11, Number 2

Summer 2009

Staying Connected to... Your Vocation

Welcome to the first issue of a two-part series on one of the most important decisions of your life – what will you become? For those who have already become something or many things in your life, you might re-phrase the question as, what will you continue to become? We wish to speak here about vocations in the broad sense. Vocation comes to us from *vocare*, “to call” in Latin. It is safe to say that we will all experience many different callings in life – to a career, a mate, a particular country or part of the world, perhaps even to religious life.



calls to the priesthood, diaconate or consecrated life. Of course, ordination is not the only vocational sacrament in the Catholic Church. Matrimony is also a vocation, and many people consider a lifelong commitment to being single to be a vocation. There are many ways to live out our various vocations.



Vocations are both personal and communal. We cannot call ourselves to something greater; we are called to a particular place by someone or something else. People of faith recognize God as the One calling. God does this so that we can be happy and fulfilled. Vocations

simply require of us the ability to be still and hear that call. The articles included in this issue attempt to help you discern your own vocation. We also provide some reassurances if you are among the many who have not yet figured out your vocation. Finally, we reflect on the United States redefining its vocation nowadays as a nation that values service.

Consider how your own period of volunteer service may have inspired such a calling. That might manifest itself in being convinced that you should pursue a Master of Social Work degree after you did case management for victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. It might be an insatiable desire to return to Africa some day and in the meantime to do all that you can to advocate for debt forgiveness for developing nations. These may not have been particular passions of yours before you served as a volunteer for a year or more, but you allowed your mission experience to inspire your vocation.

We hope to show that vocations are so much more than the work that one chooses to do in life. Nonetheless, knowing your vocation will really inform your job search, which will be the subject of the next issue of *Staying Connected*.

Catholics often think of vocations exclusively as

The Vocation of a Nation

In this issue, we devote most of our attention to discerning your individual vocation, but have you ever thought about your church’s vocation? Your workplace’s? Your city’s? Your nation’s? **If we think of vocation broadly as a calling, mission, or purpose, then it makes sense to think of institutional vocations as well as individual vocations.**



The current economic recession in the United States has led many individuals, families, businesses, and communities to re-examine their vocations. Those who once felt called to material gain are learning to value other callings, such as education, innovation, service, and living in right relationship with others. One recent sign of a shift in priorities for the United States is the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Public Law 111-13), which was signed into law on April 21, 2009.

Among its many goals, **the Serve America Act seeks to expand the number of AmeriCorps positions in the U.S. from 75,000 to 250,000 by 2017; to increase AmeriCorps Education Awards and simplify the administration of**

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Uniting With God: Discerning Your Call

Each one of us will be called to many things in our lives. Many of us have already discerned a call to a year or more of volunteer service, and, for some, a new call that followed that term of service. But especially in these times of financial crisis, some of us may find ourselves limited in the ways we can use our gifts. This shouldn't limit our discernment.



Discernment is a way to listen to one's own heart as well as God's will. For God's desires and our desires really are one. We may not know exactly what the Lord is calling us to, but He knows what is best for us. And conversely, we may think we know exactly what we want, but it may or may not be what

God has in store for us at this time. Each experience is like a building block or a stepping stone to the next experience and our ultimate goal: union with God and His Kingdom.

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

- Thomas Merton, "Thoughts in Solitude"

Discernment skills can be used to determine even the simplest choices: how should I spend my weekend? What books or media should I spend my time reading/consuming? But usually we think of discernment as the key to revealing "that next big thing."

There are many different steps and styles for discernment, but some of the main questions to ask yourself when making a decision involve:

- Is this desire/decision a good? Will it bear healthy fruit for myself and others?
- Is it within my capacity/state in life to achieve? E.g. - Whether I am married, single, or consecrated religious, what are the things that are in my capacity to obtain, taking into consideration vows I have taken, family obligations, etc?
- What attracts me to this particular call?

This last question is an important one. In discernment, we ask God to really help us examine our desires and motives for things. They may be good in and of themselves, and they may be within reach, but we may not desire them for the right reasons. And sometimes, we desire a good for all the right reasons, yet it may not be part of God's plan for us yet.

If this is the case - that we desire a good and are rightly motivated and capable, yet find ourselves in a state of "waiting" for a particular call - we can ask ourselves: What attributes of this call can I apply right now in my life? For example, if someone desires to be a parent but is not currently a parent, what are some qualities of being a parent that one can apply to their current state in life that will bring joy to God, others, and self?

God is certainly a mysterious God, and we may not understand all of His ways. But we have real desires in our hearts that are gifts from Him, and it is also His desire that we use these gifts for the good of humanity, ourselves, and His Kingdom.

Some resources for further help with discernment:

[Discernment: Acquiring the Heart of God.](#) Marko Rupnik. Pauline Books and Media, March 2006.

[The Discernment of Spirits,](#) Rev. Timothy Gallagher. Crossroad Publishing Company, Sept. 2005.

[Discovering Your Personal Vocation: The Search for Meaning through the Spiritual Exercises,](#) Rev. Herbert Alphonso. Paulist Press, Nov. 2001.

[No Man is an Island,](#) Thomas Merton. The Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, 1955. (Chapter 8 on Vocation is especially helpful.)

Spirituality

Discovering God's transforming presence
in our lives.



When you were a child, the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" held wonder and possibility. You probably felt free to use your imagination or to "try out" different careers in the land of make-believe. When posed to us as adults, however, the question has a very different tone: "What are you *doing* with your life?" Pressure to come up with a satisfying answer to this question can come from many different sources: parents, significant others, friends, ourselves. Many people assume that declaring a vocation defines who you are, which leads to additional stress if you are not quite sure of your vocation.

We may deal with our own insecurities about finding the "perfect" vocation or face pressure from others who try to tell us what to do. At these times, it can be easy to lose sight of seeking God's love and listening to our own feelings and desires.

Fortunately, we can escape this pressure through our relationship to God. As St. John tells us, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall

see him as he is." (1 John 3:2) We don't need to define ourselves; John does that for us: "we are God's children now." And we don't need to know exactly what we're doing with our lives, because "what we shall be has not yet been revealed." You can't possibly know all of the events, possibilities, and opportunities for your future, and you can take a certain level of comfort in knowing that you shouldn't stress over that: you just can't know. But you can devote time and energy to exploring your vocation.

No matter if you feel like you've discovered your vocation or you're confused about where to begin to discern your vocation, you can take comfort in remembering God's love and knowing that our full potential has yet to be revealed. Let your spirituality rest in the Lord and not in the world, and be gentle with yourself as you flesh out your feelings and your prayers with regard to vocation. For those who feel especially pressured to figure out a career, discern a religious calling, or even land a job after completing volunteer service, Thomas Merton offers these words of comfort: "Our vocation is not a sphinx's riddle, which we must solve in one guess or perish."

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those awards; to promote service learning in schools and colleges; to create summer service opportunities for middle school students; to create full-time service positions for senior citizens; and to create a National Service Reserve Corps, in which former national service participants will be trained to provide relief during national emergencies. The Serve America Act recognizes service as an essential value in the United States, with an invaluable role in the nation's past, present, and future.



Speaking at the signing of the Serve America Act, President Obama called upon all Americans "to stand up and play your part...if you do, I promise that your life will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, you may remember it as the moment when your own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century."

As former full-time volunteers, you are already well aware of the value of service to individuals and communities. We at the Pallotti Center encourage you to make your unique perspective part of the conversation about service happening within the United States, and in other communities around the world. If you live in the United States, educate yourself and others about the Serve America Act, and take advantage of one of the many new service opportunities being created. If you live outside the United States, research opportunities to serve within your own nation or local community. With your voice and service, you can help shape the vocation of the nation!

For more information about the Serve America Act, visit the website of the [Corporation for National and Community Service](http://www.nationalservice.gov), at www.nationalservice.gov.



**The St. Vincent Pallotti Center
for Apostolic Development**

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Interviewing!

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Career Corner

Networking & Informational Interviewing: The Start of a Beautiful Relationship

By Amy Potthast, Idealist.org
(amy@idealist.org)

While it can have a smarmy connotation—using people so you can get ahead—networking is another way of saying “being a good neighbor” or “serving the community.” Wouldn’t you jump at a chance to introduce two friends who each needed a roommate? Or to tell a colleague about your favorite pizza place? Similarly, people in your network want to pass on information and make new connections for you.

And that is networking.

Okay, so that said, as you look toward your transition from service to career, one valuable networking tool to use is the informational interview. Informational interviewing expands your network of acquaintances—crucial for hearing about new opportunities.

How it works is, let’s say you’re considering a career as a librarian. Think how useful it would be to sit down and chat with a librarian about his or her work: how she got started, what education he needed, what challenges him or her, what she loves, what he recommends for your next steps.

But what if you don’t know any librarians? Of course you could walk into a library and ask a busy librarian for 20 minutes of his or her time. But chances are pretty good they don’t have 20 minutes to give a perfect stranger.



So instead you ask your friend Martha whose sister-in-law Pat is a librarian. Because Pat loves her sister-in-law Martha, and owes her the moon, of course Pat will sit down with you (as an extension of Martha) to chat about

herself with you. She’ll make time. Instead of meeting Pat at the library while she’s working, you might take her out for coffee, or arrange to call on the phone.

Once you and Pat have chatted, Pat will keep you in mind if she hears about opportunities relevant to you, and mention names of other people you should sit down and chat with over coffee. When you reach out to those people, you can let them know Pat sent you. Because they love Pat, and owe her the moon, of course they will sit down with you (as an extension of Pat)...

Keys to informational interviewing are: keep it short (15-30 minutes), don’t ask for a job, don’t ask for resume tips. Ask open-ended questions about the other person’s career and education. Read more in the *Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers*, idealist.org/careerguide.

Staying Connected: Assisting in the continued formation of former lay volunteers.

The St. Vincent Pallotti Center for Apostolic Development **Authors and Editors:** Alicia Brooks, Michael Goggin, Julia Strukely and Stacie West **Production Editor:** Stacie West
E-mail: stayingconnected@pallotticenter.org **Website:** www.pallotticenter.org

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Mission: 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.

Inspiration: The Center takes 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. Please visit our website, www.pallotticenter.org, for more information.