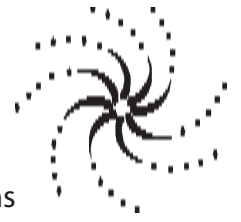


# Staying Connected



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

Volume 10, Number 1

Fall 2008

## Staying Connected to...Cultural Diversity

### Part II: Respecting the Other and Cultural Diversity

In the first part of this two-part Staying Connected dealing with cultural diversity, we explored the importance of connecting to one's own cultural identity. In this issue, we take the understanding of one's own culture a step further and discuss appreciating and understanding other cultures.

Most former volunteers have experience living and working in another culture – whether in a foreign country or in a different place among a different population in the U.S.

**Think back to your time of service and recall that experience, or others, in another culture.**

- What were some of the more prominent feelings you experienced at the time?
- What thoughts about that culture came to mind when you were in that culture?
- To what extent did you find yourself making comparisons between that culture and your home culture? Were your comparisons positive or negative toward that culture?



The eye-opening and transformative experiences of volunteer service are not limited to seeing the realities of poverty or injustice, learning to live and work with new people, and discovering more about your values. Many volunteers also gain insight into

what they do or do not like about a culture. Some former volunteers fell in love with the culture in which they served. This comes very naturally to some people, but also brings a special set of challenges. **If you were strongly attracted to the culture in which you served, consider the following:**

- Were there virtues of that culture that you exaggerated? If so, which virtues?
- To what extent did you denigrate the values of your own culture of origin and become hypercritical of that culture?
- Now that you are back in your home culture or another culture, what, if any, are some problems in the idealized culture of your volunteer service to which you were previously blind? How romanticized, or not, was your view of that culture?

Researchers have produced many reports and models over the years to help flesh out the issues surrounding cultural diversity and cultural difference. Depending on your academic or personal interests, you may be familiar with some of these. One tool, created by Dr. Milton Bennett to help explain the reactions of people in cross-cultural situations, is called the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The DMIS is also the basis for the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The assumption with the model is that “as one’s experience of cultural differences becomes more complex (i.e., less stereotypic and more adaptive), one’s competence in intercultural relations increases.” There are seven stages that describe a certain set of attitudes and behavior held by an individual as he or she relates to cultural difference. The first four are ethnocentric (one’s own culture is central to reality): Denial, Defense, Reversal, and Minimization; the last three are ethnorelative (defined in the DMIS as “one’s own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures”): Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration.

You can review the descriptions of the stages identified by Dr. Bennett here: [http://www.intercultural.org/idi\\_dmis.php](http://www.intercultural.org/idi_dmis.php). **Recall your experiences before, during, and after your term of service, or other encounters in a different culture.**

- To what extent can you place yourself in the different stages of the DMIS? With which do you most identify, and with which ones do you most struggle?
- What are some ways in which you have been able to adapt and integrate the new cultures you’ve experienced into your life? If you have not been able to do so, consider ways you can continue to connect with that culture, continue to develop your own understanding of your culture, and connect with other former volunteers who may be experiencing the same cross-cultural concerns.

As former volunteers, you have a rich base of knowledge – your own, your program’s, that of the people with whom you worked and served – about different cultures from which to draw. Incorporating another culture into your own is a continual, often lifelong, effort, but your experiences can be models for members of your culture of origin who seek to understand and accept more cultural diversity into their lives.

# Exploring Religious Diversity and Dialogue



If your volunteer service brought you to a different country, perhaps you had the chance to learn about a different faith tradition and experience its customs firsthand. What religion(s) did you see up close and personal during your volunteer year? Did anything surprise you about that encounter? Some people are surprised by how well people with different beliefs work together. In Africa, it is not uncommon to see Christians, Muslims and people of indigenous beliefs going into business together or working together for the cause of peace. India is perhaps the best case study in interreligious tolerance, with most of the major religions of the world collaborating together.

However, harmony is not universal. Wars have been fought over religious differences in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and the Balkans. Even in India, divisions along faith lines years ago led to the creation of Muslim-majority Pakistan while some Sikhs still clamor for the creation of their own nation, which they would call Khalistan. Recent violence has even targeted Christian missionaries.

Many people of good will recognize that dialogue is the key to eradicating a lack of trust among people of different religions. You might be surprised to know that you do not have to travel half-way around the world to engage in such dialogue. Since 1965, the United States has become the most religiously pluralistic nation in the world. Groups like United Religions Initiative ([www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)) have spearheaded the creation of local interfaith dialogue “cooperation circles” in cities around the world, including many

here in the U.S. If you were to engage in such a dialogue, what would you want to be sure to tell others about your own Catholic Christian faith? What stereotype about Catholicism would you want to disabuse others of? Are you willing to engage other people of faith in a dialogue where the goal is not to persuade others that your beliefs are right but rather to celebrate our mutual understanding of what we each hold sacred?

As Catholics exploring religious diversity, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Pope John Paul II. It was John Paul the Great who took the message of *Nostra Aetate*, the final document of Vatican II, to heart. He responded by calling the world’s religious leaders together in 1986 and again in 2002 for several days of dialogue and prayer at the birthplace of St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Benedict XVI has largely followed his predecessor’s lead despite some early missteps with the Islamic community. Benedict took time to meet with leaders of five different faith traditions when he visited Washington, D.C. this past April. Washington Archbishop Donald Wuerl called it a natural extension of the Pope’s visit to the capital city of the most pluralistic country in the world. How do these leaders influence your decision to dialogue with people of different faiths? Is such dialogue best left to the religious experts? Is our common humanity license enough to strike up a conversation about faith with people who do not share our beliefs? Is it sufficient to merely tolerate the beliefs of others or is the Church calling us to a deeper relationship with “the other”?

Visit the Pallotti Center's newly improved website ([www.pallotticenter.org](http://www.pallotticenter.org))! Be sure to join the Network of Former Volunteers and use this national and international listserv to connect with other former volunteers who may have similar cross-cultural experiences to yours!

Check out these resources on cultural diversity:

- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity from UNESCO, [www2.ohchr.org/english/law/diversity.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/diversity.htm)
- The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)
- National MultiCultural Institute, [www.nmci.org](http://www.nmci.org)

# Spirituality

Discovering God's transforming presence  
in our lives



Religious diversity is a fact of 21st-century American life. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, the United States is the most religiously pluralistic nation in the world. Throughout your school, volunteer, professional, and social life, you have probably encountered people from a wide variety of faith traditions. Sharing aspects of our religious lives with friends of other faiths and learning more about our friends' religious traditions can be a wonderful experience, deepening both faith and friendship. At the same time, such experiences can be intimidating. We may feel nervous inviting a friend of another faith to our house of worship. Will they feel comfortable? Will our church community welcome them? Will they worry that we are trying to "convert" them? Similarly, we may feel anxious visiting a faith community other than our own. Will we know how to behave? Will people be offended by the presence of an outsider? Fortunately, you can ease such anxieties with a little bit of preparation.

When inviting a friend of another faith to your house of worship, help your guest feel prepared and comfortable by sharing a bit about your church, what happens during a typical service, and who will be there. Be sure to answer the following questions:

- How do most people dress?
- How long is the service?
- Will your guest be able to sit with you? If not, where should (s)he sit?
- Are visitors introduced during the service? If so, how?
- Will an offering be collected?
- May guests participate in all aspects of the service?
- How does your church celebrate the Eucharist? Who may partake?
- If your guest is uncomfortable participating in part of the service, how can (s)he politely "opt out"?

If you are unsure about your church's policies on guests, take some time to speak to your priest or another church leader about your wish to bring a friend of another faith to church with you. Finally, on the day of your guests' visit, participate in the service as you normally would. Your guest will feel more comfortable and have a richer experience if you do not alter your behavior on his/her account.

If you are invited to a worship service, ceremony, or special event by a friend of another faith, take some time to educate yourself on your friend's faith tradition and how you should behave as a guest. Also

Former Volunteer  
Sightings in

**Lexington &  
Louisville, KY**

**Parishes & Retreat Centers:** *Lexington:* St. Paul Parish features many social justice and service opportunities, <http://saintpaul.cdlex.org> // *Louisville:* Church of the Epiphany has an outdoor Labyrinth and a large Social Responsibility ministry, [www.churchofepiphany.com](http://www.churchofepiphany.com); Passionist Earth & Spirit Center, an interfaith institute with many programs, [www.earthandspiritcenter.org](http://www.earthandspiritcenter.org) // *Nerinx:* Cedars of Peace retreat houses, near the Loretto Motherhouse, 270-865-5291 // *Trappist:* The Abbey of Gethsemani offers retreats and prayer and church services, [www.monks.org](http://www.monks.org).

**Civic and Volunteer Opportunities:** *Lexington:* Kentucky Refugee Ministries, [www.kyrm.org](http://www.kyrm.org) // *Louisville:* Americana Community Center, [www.americanacc.org](http://www.americanacc.org).

**Things to Do:** *Lexington:* The Opera House ([www.lexingtonoperahouse.com](http://www.lexingtonoperahouse.com)) and the Kentucky Theatre ([www.kentuckytheatre.com](http://www.kentuckytheatre.com)) feature both local and national performances, including the Woodsongs Old Time Radio House (Kentucky Theatre) // *Louisville:* The Kentucky Derby (first Saturday in May) and related events, including Thunder Over Louisville, [www.kentuckyderby.com](http://www.kentuckyderby.com)

For more sightings, visit:  
[www.pallotticenter.org/index.php?m=ra](http://www.pallotticenter.org/index.php?m=ra)

Thanks to Kristen Smiley, Kathleen Yeager, Amy Harned, and Beth Dotson Brown for the suggestions!

Look for our profile of **Boston, MA**,  
in the next issue of *Staying Connected*.

If you know of resources in Boston that no former should be without, email [stayingconnected@pallotticenter.org](mailto:stayingconnected@pallotticenter.org).

research what your church says about participating in other services. Doing this "homework" in preparation for the service or event will ease any anxieties you may have, and also show respect for your friend's beliefs and religious community. An excellent resource to have on hand is [How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook](#), Fourth Edition, edited by Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, and published by Skylight Paths Publishing (2006). This guide provides basic information on 29 different faith traditions, including 21 Christian denominations. For each faith group, the book contains information on history and beliefs; statistics about membership; guides to basic services, holy days and festivals, life cycle events (marriages, funerals, etc.), and home celebrations; and a brief list of resources for further information. Matlins and Magida provide visitors with concise but complete guides to guest etiquette in each faith group.



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## IN THIS ISSUE:

Exploring religious  
diversity, connecting  
to cultural diversity, and  
sightings in Lexington  
and Louisville, KY!

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE FUTURE EDITIONS OF STAYING CONNECTED VIA  
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Help us recycle. Please do your part by passing on your copy to another former volunteer  
or by recycling the paper. Thanks!

## *Diversify Your Media and Keep an Open Mind*

In a society in which much of our culture is influenced by the media, we all find ourselves consuming a variety of types of media daily: newspapers, magazines, television, internet, etc.

The news media, in particular, are meant to provide a service to society and dispense information to us accurately. However, the reality is that bias and money influence much of the information that comes across the airwaves, and we are often left with a slightly slanted message.

We all have our partialities and biases, and may find ourselves using the news sources that side with our partialities. How, then, can we keep an open mind and be assured that we are receiving a full and complete message?

Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase that Media and Cultural Studies analysts use often: "The Medium is the Message". That is to say, the medium itself - be it a liberal magazine or a conservative TV show - is itself a message that you are receiving, consciously or not. If you are only consuming news from a particular medium, you may be only getting one message. Is that the only message that exists? Is that the only one you should receive?

In this issue in which we are discussing Cultural Diversity, we encourage you to look at how you might diversify your



perceptions. You can start by varying the types of media you choose.

### ***Diversify Your Media***

What sources do you use to obtain information? Television? Internet? Newspapers? Magazines? If you find yourself only using one particular medium, you may try diversifying your sources from which you obtain your information.



### ***Diversify Your News Sources***

Research the news source that you find yourself using most. Is it backed or financed by a particular funder with any particular agenda? Challenge yourself to use a different news source to receive messages from a differing viewpoint.

### ***Two Sides to Each Story***

It has been said there are 'two sides to every story'. Our cultural upbringings tend to only involve one side of a story: our parents' story, the stories of our friends, or the story we were raised being told. The media tell us many stories, but they are not always two-sided. Make sure you hear the other side of any issue - especially if it differs from yours.

### ***Respect Diversity***

It is easy to get ignited about issues close to us, especially in an election year. It is common for politicians to put down their opponents and their viewpoints. It is important to be passionate, but also to respect and tolerate each others' differences. Choose the high road and hold onto your beliefs, but respect those whose opinions may differ from yours.

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

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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.