SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Ten, Number Three

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

"Practice Resurrection"

by Kate Carter

International Solidarity Center, El Salvador; Jesuit Volunteer Corps

Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.
Wendell Berry, American poet.

The facts in El Salvador were sobering. Poverty prevailed. Access to health care and education was not available for most. The economy was in shambles, over-dependent on family remittances from outside the country. Crime was on the rise. Gangs were arriving from Los Angeles. Weeks after the Truth Commission published its report on the years of atrocities by military forces, the National Assembly passed a general amnesty for all those implicated. Human rights violations continued. The 1992 Peace Accords were being implemented SLOWLY. The government's resistance was obvious and painful for the majority, those in greatest need to benefit.

And yet, when I remember my experiences in El Salvador two things come to mind: community and celebrations. Life was intense. People struggled, but their response to difficulties and suffering created community, a community which celebrated together. Perhaps celebrations were sweeter and poignant because of tremendous hardships. And there was always something to celebrate: someone's arrival, a delegation's departure, an anniversary of a death, the completion of a month of Spanish classes, the first ESL (English as a Second Language) class, and birthdays.

"...when I remember my experiences in El Salvador two things come to mind: community and celebrations."

Celebrations weren't often elaborate but they were joyful. And dancing was almost always involved. It seemed the dancing, while lots of fun, was also a physical release of tension. And there was plenty of that! Early in our volunteer year we celebrated my birthday in language school. The classroom where I studied Spanish was decorated with colorful crepe paper and a couple of balloons. A simple handwritten sign "Feliz Cumpleaños" hung on the wall. During our morning break, the teachers, other students, staff members and I shared cake and coffee. I was grateful that someone knew it was my

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Hello volunteers out there in volunteer-land! As you continue to journey through your time of service, we highlight the value of celebrating your experience and suggest new ways of doing this!

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"A Celebration of Life"

by Joey Davis

New Orleans Volunteer Service Community; Notre Dame Mission Volunteers

"And where do y'all think you're going?" The man asked this question with a broad grin and winked at his buddies. I smiled back.

"On our way back to school. We just came from church," I replied.

"Well, before you go, I'll make you a bet."

"All right," I responded, more than willing to play along.

"I bet everyone here knows the name of that reindeer with the red nose."

"Rudolph!" some students shouted, while others looked confused.

"Well, we're gonna play, you're gonna sing." And with that, he began to play his sax and his buddies the guitar. Surprisingly, some of my eighteen 5th graders didn't know the words, but they caught on toward the end. I was ecstatic, because New Orleans has some of the best street performers in the world, and now my kids had the opportunity to celebrate Christmas and performance with them.

In reflecting on my life as a volunteer, the word "celebrate" seems to consistently emerge in every aspect of the experience. Whether I was

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birthday and had paid attention to acknowledge the occasion. But it was understood that remembering and celebrating life is important.

Other "slides" of celebrations in my memory include a gathering of thousands of persons in *La Plaza Civica* (The Central Square) in San Salvador for the closing of the presidential campaign. For the first time in their history, the FMLN (the political party representing the poor majority) and their supporters participated in the electoral process. It was quite a joyous occasion! The only larger gathering to date had been after the signing of the Peace Accords.

I appreciated the invitation to celebrate *"el dia de los muertos"* (the day of the dead) with one of my colleagues and her family. We gathered to share a meal and the day with one another. We walked to the graveyard with a neighbor's family. Much of the cemetery we visited was cement vaults or tombstones. Hours passed cleaning the gravesite and placing flowers where loved ones were buried. Stories were told to keep memories alive.

Christmas is celebrated on December 24th. Throughout the day, in the countryside, many tamales are prepared. It's quite a labor-intensive project. In the evening, the teenage girls prepared a Christmas pageant to depict the travels of Mary and Joseph; then liturgy was celebrated. Folkloric dancing and colorful costumes were part of the event. During and after Mass, the men and boys set off firecrackers (a custom I didn't really understand or appreciate!). Afterward, the entire village participated in a community dance.

At the end of the year, the center where I worked hosted a *despedida* (farewell) for another volunteer and me. Food and drink were prepared; appreciations offered; simple gifts bestowed. Dozens of persons attended: co-workers, our ESL students, colleagues from other organizations, host families and all who had become part of our extended community. It was the best dance I'd been to all year. An amazing celebration of a year of common work, growth and changes.

My desire to live and work in El Salvador evolved after years of working in the United States with Central Americans and/or on their behalf. In the early 1980's I began to work with the faith-based sanctuary movement providing shelter for refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala. The stories told by persons whose lives were changed by studying the gospel and working for justice changed me. I heard stories of persons whose faith and courage taught me to live with my heart fixed on hope and freedom. Their efforts to create and sustain community across borders inspired an international solidarity movement that continues today.

There are many stories that a variety of persons could share about my life in community, whether in the U.S. or in El Salvador. It wasn't always pretty. But I do treasure the relationships that have taught me to be human. Living and working to create community has also empowered me to work for change in myself and in our world, to appreciate humor, to pray, to speak truth to power, to risk arrest, to witness the passion and death of Christ in Detroit and in Central America, to create music, to grow in love and service to the gospel, to know my limitations as well as my talents, to heal, to live and work in El Salvador... to celebrate life and death.

A friend of mine gave me a copy of the Berry poem many years ago. I refer to it often. The last line is *"practice resurrection."* It reminds us that a gift of our faith is that, by celebrating life, we get to practice resurrection. Everyday. ✚

Left-Overs

What to Do with Those Left-Overs?

Why not use the left-over and 'close-to-expiring' food in your fridge for your next party or community gathering? Here are a few ideas!

Clear out the fridge and cupboards, make a spread to see what you've got, then ...

- combine different foods and add to a broth to make a stew.
- jazz up your left-overs by adding spices, fresh veggies or fruits, cheese, etc.
- make a variety of finger foods, or try a *tapas* style Spanish meal with a large number of small samples.
- make a buffet with all your 'new & improved' dishes.
- have guests bring over their left-overs, too!

Questions for Kate's article:

- Which celebrations during your volunteer experience have been particularly meaningful to you? Why? Talk with someone or write about past celebrations as a way to cherish their special memories.
- Think back to your childhood when you went to Mass with your family or friends. What were your feelings about going to the celebration of the Mass? What are your feelings or thoughts now?
- What changes can you observe in yourself, in your perspective, or in your own prayer or community habits which are to be celebrated? Share your insight with another, and highlight the growth you have noted in that person as well.
- Kate wrote about witnessing the passion and death of Christ - as well as the resurrection. During this Lenten & Easter season, can you identify such symbols in your own life? in the life of the community around you? Think of creative ways to *practice resurrection*, even in the face of defeat or "death."
- Like coal becoming a diamond or an oyster producing a pearl, some of life's most difficult experiences give way to the richest/biggest blessings. Try cultivating a sense of celebration of your own past experiences or of those you may be witnessing now. How can you identify aspects to be celebrated, even from painful or challenging events?

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seeking it or not, a celebration seemed to await me at every turn. It was a crucial part of my volunteer experiences, both in New Orleans and San Francisco. What struck me as strange about the concept of celebrating is how I was able to do it in so many different ways. The idea of celebration never occurred to me as "important" at that time; only in hindsight did I realize this was the glue that held my sanity together through the various trials and struggles which crept up throughout my time of volunteer service.

CELEBRATING YOUR COMMUNITY

I, and most volunteers I knew, belonged to several communities to which we attached ourselves during our time of service. The one closest to us was probably the community where we lived, but I should also remember our vocational community and the community at large.

I feel that one of the noblest choices a volunteer can make is to live in community. Despite struggles and personality conflicts that may arise, everyone in the community chose to live there. I had experiences with both strong and weak living communities, and in both cases the need to celebrate with my housemates was imperative to building a solid foundation.

Our celebrating took many forms: Halloween costume parties; community prayers and dinners; driving to the Gulf; Shakespeare in the park. Celebrating with my housemates allowed us to share experiences and a feeling of togetherness.

I also remember celebrating with the people with whom I worked, going out to restaurants or community theatres. I really valued those celebrations because it gave me a real flavor of the place where I was volunteering.

We also had a weekly basketball game with some teenagers from a local detention center. Getting out of our house to celebrate with people in the larger community was an integral part of my experience. And it made things fun.

CELEBRATING THE CHALLENGES

"Looking back, much of those strengths came out of the challenges I faced during my time of service."

It occurs to me, in almost all experiences and situations throughout our lives, that we tend to take away much more than we can possibly give. I came out of my volunteer years a much stronger, mature, fun-loving individual than I was right after I graduated college.

Looking back, many of those strengths came out of the challenges I faced during my time of service. They pushed me emotionally, psychologically, and physically. I think there is an important celebration that is called for when we are pushed to be better human beings. I was often happy to celebrate those challenges by saying a prayer of thanksgiving to God for presenting them to me.

CELEBRATING IN SOLIDARITY

I think one of the best aspects of my volunteer experiences in New Orleans was our ability to get out and celebrate with the other volunteers in the city. It created such a strong sense of solidarity and purpose; God had brought all of us here together in these various positions for this short time — and we made the most of it. It created a fantastic support group and allowed us to branch out to discover new places and people with whom to celebrate.

There are so many ways, opportunities, and moments to celebrate as volunteers. My years of service are overflowing with those memories. And throughout all those memories, there is one realization that seems to link them all together: that my entire experience as a volunteer was in itself a celebration, a celebration of life. ✚

Questions for Joey's Article:

- Joey Davis recounted a spontaneous street celebration of Christmas. Describe some benefits that you think came to the children and to the musical performers. Describe any spontaneous celebration you have experienced and name any consequences it had for you or other participants.
- Pick one of your favorite kinds of celebrations, broadly understood, such as a sporting event, religious ceremony, a ritualistic gathering of friends or family. Ask yourself: what value within myself does that celebration appeal to? Why do I like it so much?
- Is there a person in your life, perhaps someone you have met this year, who you know to be skilled at celebrating? What are the characteristics or the approach this individual utilizes to facilitate celebrations of life's small and grand triumphs? Perhaps talk with this person. What can you learn from his/her example?
- Joey very much enjoyed celebrating with other volunteers in New Orleans because it created such a strong sense of solidarity, purpose and support. How can you or your community celebrate your common desire and call to live the Gospel with other volunteers in your city or region? Make plans to get together!
- By celebrating with the people with whom Joey worked, he was able to get a real flavor of the place where he was volunteering. How do you take advantage of the local culture? What have you learned about the values it celebrates? Make a list of the places and things you still want to do and see. Make plans to do them!

What Calls You to Celebrate?

As a way of remembering and re-living some of your favorite celebratory moments, complete the chart below. Ask yourself: What are the major celebrations, whether personal, religious, family, local or national, which I have enjoyed?

Occasion	Date	Any special people present?	Aspects of this celebration which made it a favorite

Personal or Small Group Discussion Questions:

Give an example of how a celebration:

1. Heightened your appreciation of life. 2. Added color to what could have been a mono-chromatic world of routine.
3. Opened you up to a different or bigger world; a transcendent world. 4. Raised your awareness of life's simple joys and little victories.
5. Helped you experience other dimensions of humanity (surprise, wonder, ritual, the unknown).

Practical Questions:

What is one event you would enjoy celebrating before your volunteer service ends? In the next year? In the next 5 years?

What Kind of Party Animal are You?

"Fiddler on the Roof," the classic play about celebrating life, raises many imaginative questions. "If I Were a Rich Man," "Tradition" and "To Life," for example, point to certain values that help people enjoy life and keep their sense of balance (reader: feel free to break into song!). The following exercise invites volunteers to reflect on which of the following "party animals," if any, resembles your approach to celebrating life.

Susie the Storyteller - Life of the party; is good at surprising others and starting fun party games. Has lots of creativity for making cards, decorations, etc.

Fred the Follower - Enjoys attending parties, but rarely initiates them. Makes his own unique contributions. Content to make deeper connections with just a few people at group celebrations. More an introvert than an extrovert.

Silly Sal - Helps others have fun by being willing to play the clown. Has a gift for making an enjoyable mountain out of a molehill. Throws parties for no reason at all, e.g., for an un-birthday!

Cool Chad - Knows how to chill out. Never sweats the small stuff. Has a natural and childlike sense of awe. Revels in the meaning and simple abundance of everyday life.

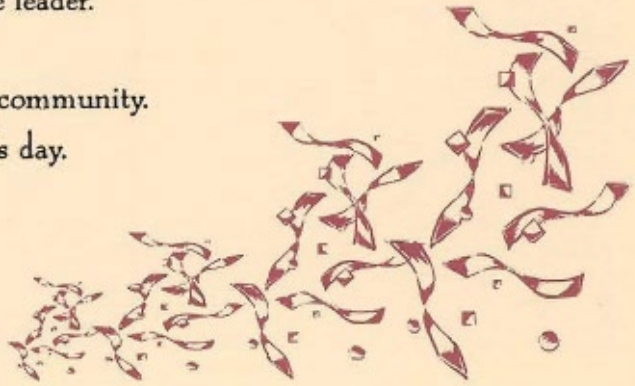
You! - Use the space to the right to sketch the party animal that most closely matches *your* personality. Then describe how you are at a party; share your characteristics, either from above or others.

"You should dance often so when you get to heaven you'll remember how to have fun."

-St. Teresa of Avila

Celebration ideas our "party animals" suggest for volunteers:

- The birthday of a famous social justice leader.
- The first day of summer.
- An anniversary of living together as a community.
- A religious feast day or a patron saint's day.
- The gift of a special friendship.
- A job well done!
- Earth Day.



Biblical Reflection: Can You Let Scripture Tell Your Story?

Here's a biblical reflection for individuals and groups. Be creative!

1. Based on your knowledge of scripture, each person privately makes a list of bible stories which took place at a celebration or which referred to a celebration of any kind.

2. Invite everyone to read their list aloud, and, if needed, to say a few words about why they considered that bible scene a celebration. (Examples below if needed.)

3. Ask yourself: if you could have participated in only one of the events on anyone's list, which would it be, and why?

4. Sit quietly. Imagine the sights and sounds of your chosen event. Who is present? Are you close to anyone there? What attracts you to this celebration? What does this attraction tell you about yourself, your values, about where your heart is? Share your thoughts or meditation with others.

Examples: Christ's birth (Luke 2: 1-20), Return of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2), Cana Wedding Feast (John 2: 1-12), Last Supper (Matt. 26: 26-29), Creation (Genesis 1,2), Exodus (Exodus 26), etc.

Shared Visions

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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, Paterson, NJ, 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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