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 —

By the Way How are YOU Feeling?

Here are actual quotes from volunteers at the end of their time of service. Circle any statements that you identify with, and turn to page 2.

My volunteer year changed me and helped me to take risks, to experience feelings more deeply, to question why I have certain beliefs. -Mark

I feel myself pulling back, not wanting to get more involved or get more attached to the people here. - Molly

As my departure draws near, I find myself really appreciating and cherishing each moment. -Tiffany

I feel like I'm stuck in a rut. -Gary

After my volunteer service ends, I really want to keep the spirit of my year alive. -Sharon

I am tired of my position and I want to move on. -Gary

It's been so difficult that at times I have been seriously tempted to leave my volunteer placement. -Elizabeth

I feel sad that I am leaving, but in my heart I feel like it is time for me to return home. -Tiffany

Working with the poor has made me feel more human and more fully alive. -Mark

For me, this past year of service has been a time of growing up. -John

I am wondering if I should live inside or outside corporate America. -Jim

For me, saying goodbye is going to be some last minute tears and hugs. - Megeen

I FEEL LIKE I HAVE LEFT SO MANY THINGS UNDONE. -MOLLY

I am really going to miss the laughter, support and pain provided by my fellow volunteers. -Gibson

I am very tired. -Alice

I feel overwhelmed by the big questions about my undecided future. -Gary

I'm hoping that at the end of my volunteer service a light bulb will click on and I'll see clearly where I am headed. -Carrie

My time of service has pushed me emotionally, psychologically and physically. -Joey

I'm coming out of my volunteer year a much stronger, mature, fun-loving individual than I was right after I graduated college. - Joey

I'm beginning to feel caught between two worlds, my volunteer world and my post-volunteer world. -Bill

I'm afraid that when I leave here, my body will be back home but my heart will still be here. -Tiffany

I feel like I have no time for closure, for saying my goodbyes. -Tiffany

I can't imagine how I could ever be emotionally removed from my volunteer year. -Sharon

Exploring potential job opportunities is as appealing as cleaning my roommates' bathroom. - Gary

I have been feeling a lot of pressure from friends, community members, family and co-workers asking me about my plans for the coming year. -Ellen

The year for me was one of the most exciting, challenging, eye-opening and worthwhile of my life. -Sharon

After looking forward for so long to the day when I would finally get to go home, as the time comes near, I'm beginning to feel I don't want to leave. -Bill

How Are You Feeling?

As it comes time to say goodbye....Consider the phrases you circled on page one. Do the statements you circled follow a pattern? Read on and see if you can identify with one or more of the following character descriptions below.

Are You Ready To Move On?

Then you may be a ***Move-On Mo*** and you just don't understand all this emotion that everyone around you is experiencing. You have been ready to move on to the next phase in your life for months now. Your heart and mind always find themselves two steps ahead of reality and right now you are excited to think of what graduate school/job/the "real world" will be like. Perhaps you realize the significance the volunteer experience will hold for you, but you simply are ready to "move on."

Although you may not understand the emotionality of your housemates and their grief, your role in community is important and you can actually help them to see that the future may not be so bleak. At the same time you could personally try to focus more on the present moment. You may be surprised at the amount of anxiety this takes away. Cultivating a sense of the present moment can be a life long journey, but well worth it!

Torn Between Two Worlds?

If you are ***Culture Shock Catie*** you are in between two worlds. You heart is torn between returning to your family and friends at home and leaving your placement site. You realize it will be difficult to return home and not compare how everything was done in community. You are struggling with the idea of how to communicate all you have seen, heard and learned to those at home. Being exposed to the many injustices of the world, you can't imagine returning home to all the materialism, wealth, etc. All this and keep a simple lifestyle? AHAHAH!

Don't panic Culture Shock Catie. There are many volunteers who have experienced the same emotions and internal chaos that you are going through... and they have made it through the transition. Quiet time in prayer will allow you to reflect on what things you want to "take home" with you. Is it a new understanding of relationships? A daily prayer routine? An openness to loving others despite all economic, racial, and religious barriers? Talking with others about your experience will be crucial for you. Start saying your *goodbyes* and *thank yous* early on so that you are not rushed in the end.

Do You Need A Lot Of Time To Process Everything?

If you are a ***Processing Pam*** type of person you are typically calm, cool, and you take everything in. As everyone's year of service is coming to a close, you notice the various ways people are handling the closure process. Some volunteers seem to avoid the pain of saying goodbye and so begin to emotionally withdraw from housemates, co-workers, clients, or students. You notice other volunteers who take a deep breath and implement their plan for personally saying goodbye to those with whom they have worked. You understand both approaches but you're convinced that there's no escaping the feelings of loss which are starting to percolate within you. You've got a great set of questions you find helpful to ask yourself on a daily basis. Is this approach to saying *goodbye* really working for me? What am I feeling right now? Is this situation I'm in today like any other I've been in previously? Am I responding to what I'm experiencing today, or are my feelings more about some goodbye that was unresolved yesterday? Be patient with others, Pam, because not everybody works as analytically as you do. Give them the time and space to talk with others about their feelings and strategies. Listen carefully and see if you can support them in asking their questions. Maybe offer an occasional supportive: "Can you say a few more words about that?" Enjoy the diversity of approaches, Pam.

Are You Truly Inspired?

Then you could be a ***Charged Charlie*** and you have been irrevocably changed by the experience of living and working with the poor. You identify, like never before, with the needs of the poor and you feel spiritually called to continue the same type of work for the rest of your life. Saying good-bye to your volunteer experience is not a big deal to you for two reasons: for one, you are charged and pumped up to continue your activism, and two, you know that wherever you go there will be similarly poor folks to take care of. The volunteer experience has been one high after another for you and with your new vision of things you are ready to take on corporate America in all its greed and sin.

Charged Charlies are commendable for their strong vision and dedication to social justice. As a Charged Charlie, you might want to remember that without true understanding of your motivation and at least some contemplation it will be hard to give fully of yourself. Sometimes staying "high" on helping others, prevents us from looking at our own wounds.

Do You Even Have Time For Goodbyes?

If that's the case you could be a ***Busy-Bee Bonnie***, and you may have decided before volunteering what your plans for afterward would be. You are happiest when you are involved in some activity, whether it be helping, or making plans for the future. Saying goodbye to your volunteer community you know is necessary, but with so much to do and so many things to look forward to, there really is no time to dwell on sad goodbyes. Besides, you've already planned to come and visit once or twice a year anyway! You have served faithfully and without complaint in your community, and it's been one event after another the whole year-long.

As a Busy-Bee Bonnie you might want to take some time to reflect on your volunteer year with a friend (see activities on pages 3,4,5). Having someone to share your story and pray with might enable you to reflect easier on what you have lived and learned. Prayer and reflection are important tools in unwrapping our experiences. Don't underestimate the sadness you may be feeling.

Leaving? Who's Leaving?

If you are a ***Denial Don*** you are saying to yourself, "Leaving? Who is leaving?" You have not yet acknowledged that you are actually leaving your volunteer placement site. You are throwing all of your time and energy into the various projects, work, and relationships that you have been working so hard on. You are in your normal routine, cherishing every minute with those around you. The idea of no longer interacting with the people you have come to know and love is not reality. "I don't have to say *goodbye*, I'll just say, 'see you later.' " Saying goodbye will be short, quick and to the point. How hard can it be to leave? Leaving this experience will not hit you until you are boarding the plane or waving goodbye from the car window.

Denial Don, wake up! Preparing to leave and spending time saying goodbye is a crucial element of finding closure. Plan on finishing "work" ahead of time in order to slow down and plan how you want to say goodbye to those you have lived and worked with. Set aside an appropriate amount of time to talk with those who are closest to you. Pray and reflect on the fact that YOU ARE LEAVING! ✚

Next Step: Simple Clarifying Questions to Ask Yourself

Leaving your placement site, community members, and friends can be a very challenging experience. Often times volunteers are overwhelmed by the future and all the questions that come with it. What am I going to do? Where am I going to live? While it is important to ask yourself these questions, you don't want to rush into anything too quickly. We've come up with four simple questions that you can begin to think about now, before you leave your placement site. Listing the pros and cons of each question will help you take the first step to clarifying your options for the future.

Tips for making a Pros and Cons List

⇨ Do this alone. Wait awhile for your list to sink in before sharing it with others.
⇨ Be honest with yourself and consider things like, free rent, curfew, costs....
⇨ Ask yourself, "Am I burnt out?".

Do you want to live at home?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Do you want to stay involved with the program you volunteered with?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Do you want to pursue a career in a field different from your course of studies in college?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Do you want to find a job right away ?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

PROS	CONS

Understanding Your Volunteer Story

..... *While It's Fresh*

As your time as a volunteer comes to an end, you may sense that the experience has formed you, perhaps profoundly. You may also suspect it will continue to have an impact on your life for many years to come.

In fact, you will have an important story to share and initially the best person to tell it to is yourself. A wonderful way to prepare yourself for the future is to begin to understand the circumstances and experiences that have led up to these final days as a volunteer.

Former volunteers can tell you that ongoing reflection on your volunteer story will indeed continue to surprise and enlighten you for years to come. Some alumni have an easier time with this than others. We've found that what makes a difference is first familiarizing yourself with your story and assessing it while it's still fresh in your mind and heart.

Suggestions: Here are some thoughts to help you get started and take stock of your volunteer or mission experience. At least initially, focus on *what* happened to you rather than *why* things happened. Work toward the big picture, getting a sweep of your entire time of service. The beginning, middle and end of your term of service are equally important.

Try to bring to mind patterns and defining moments, the relationships and incidents that established the direction of your volunteer year. Look for times when you learned from mistakes and times when you repeated the same mistakes over and over. Consider what you have regretted and, conversely, what brought you great joy. ✚

Reflection Questions: Taking Stock

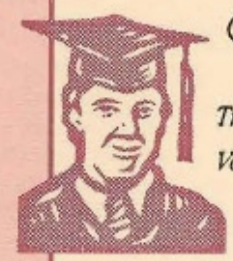
Here are some questions that will help you unpack your volunteer story. You could answer them privately in a journal or in reflection or, you could share your answers with a friend.

1. **What were three occasions during your time of service when you felt very elated?**
2. **What were three times when you experienced deep sadness?**
3. **Volunteers often feel they gained more than they gave. What did you gain? Give?**
4. **Name the people whom you helped the most during your period of service.**
5. **What were your favorite holidays and how did you celebrate them?**
6. **What were some things, if any, that angered you during your period of service?**
7. **What were some of the unexpected challenges of living in community?**
8. **What initially motivated you to consider doing volunteer service?**
9. **What were some ways your motivation changed over the past year(s)?**
10. **What was your relationship with money during your volunteer service?**
11. **What were some ways your relationship with God changed over the past year?**
12. **How has your understanding or practice of faith changed during this time?**
13. **Did your volunteer experiences make any differences in how you prayed? Explain.**
14. **Did you begin to see yourself or think of yourself in any new ways? How?**

Voices of Volunteers

"I remember coming home from my year living in community with handicapped adolescents, and thinking, 'I know I lived a dramatic and very profound experience and that it's going to stay with me forever, but at this moment I can't stop to figure out what it means? What I really need right now is a job!' Mary L'Arche

Comic Relief



Timmy before Volunteering.....

.....and Timmy after!

Telling Your Volunteer Story

..... *The Challenge You Might Not Have Imagined*

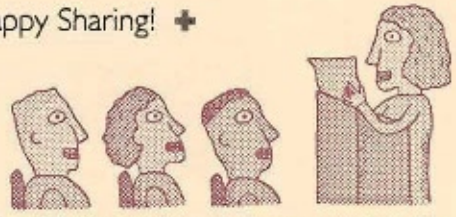
It's one thing to understand your story and feel as though you have done a psychologically balanced job of assessing it all (and that's not to say that the process will not continue with the passage of time). It's a whole other ball of wax to communicate that story to various people and audiences. As former volunteers can tell you, you should be prepared to communicate your story effectively, respectfully and genuinely.

Volunteers can experience disappointment when family and friends seem disinterested or only partly interested in their volunteer story. Family and friends on the other hand, often feel judged or threatened by the volunteer, fearing that not a bit of their old *son/daughter/friend/brother/sister* still remains after so much time away.

In short, the experience of sharing and telling your story can be liberating and cathartic, but also frustrating and upsetting for yourself and others.

Therefore, in light of these challenges we present you with some tips for telling your volunteer story.

Happy Sharing! ✚



"Ladies and Gentlemen, the topic of my presentation will be 'Volunteering: The Road to Unimagined Bliss or Complete Suffering?'"

Tips for Communicating Your Story

- Be genuine. Be true to your ideals and your experience. Don't make the elements of your story more or less dramatic than they were in order to seem more appealing.

- Reflect on where your listener is coming from. Ask yourself the following questions: Have they volunteered before? Have they ever met someone who volunteered full time? What was your relationship to that person in the past? What is your relationship now?

- Take the answers to the above questions into account and respectfully address your listener.

- Don't judge! Ask yourself, "Are my parents/friends etc. ready to hear what I have to say?" Reflect, "Are my emphases on simple living, social justice, etc. just veiled judgments or am I responding to them with love and respect?"

- With that in mind be prepared that some people will need you to tell them the essence of your story in a few minutes.

- Prepare different versions of your story for different audiences, e.g., a 2-3 minute version, 5- minute version, or even a 60- minute version with food and stories.

- Do not take negative reactions or inattentiveness as a judgment on your experience. Only you know the true worth of what you have lived!

- Understand that no one can validate or legitimate your experience for you. That's your responsibility.

- Don't think of telling your story as "unloading" it. Unloading is best done with a former volunteer, a spiritual director, a mental health professional and most importantly, God.

- *Ask God to be with you during this time of transition and communication. Trust in the Spirit's guidance, know that you have your own good news to share, and take heart in the experience of the early disciples who spread the message of Christ all over the world.*

Bible Stories About Conversions Can Expand Your Own Story

The New Testament is filled with action-packed inspirational stories about how faith changed people's lives. Many of its best known narratives describe moving experiences such as on Pentecost Sunday when the apostles' preaching converted thousands. Similarly St. Paul's conversion led him to convert thousands throughout the Greek and Roman world.

These powerful stories encourage listeners to respond with enthusiasm and give themselves entirely over to lives of faith. Notice, for example, the story of when Jesus called the apostles. They heard his call to "follow me" and "at once they left their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:18). St. Luke echoed this same theme: "they *left everything* and followed him" (5:11).

Notice, however, three years after the apostles initially responded and left all, John's gospel tells us they had obviously gone back to using their fishing nets big time (John 21:6). After all, that was how they put bread on their families' tables. John's gospel, written decades after Mark's and Luke's, takes a different approach which assumed the apostles remained fishermen and were knee-deep in life's uncertainties. John describes an early dawn scene when, at Jesus' instructions, the apostles cast their nets into the sea's dark and still waters. They then caught so many fish, 153 big ones he noted, which strained the net tremendously, yet it did not break (21:12).

Our point is that you, as a volunteer or missioner responded confidently to an initial call and left all. Now you are returning to everyday life with all its uncertainties. Retrieving your nets, and working with the ambiguities of dark waters can yield great results. What are your skills (nets), your uncertainties (dark waters)? What gives you buoyancy? Where do you feel called to cast your fortune? John's biblical stories suggest that the meaning of your initial, single-minded conversion can mature and become clearer over time. In John's fishing story, Jesus gives you permission to embrace life's uncertainties and the confidence you need as you leave your service program and rediscover your net. ✚

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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. Regional 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.

Time of service almost up? Contact us to sign up for our *Job Bank* email newsletter with job listings throughout the country. Also, ask your program for the *"What's Next Notebook: A Former Volunteers' Guide To Living Through Transition."*

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