SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Fourteen, Number Three

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

Easter: Rising to the Challenge

Easter is coming and that's all about new life. It's also about how to get there, namely by dying to the old self and rising to the new. It's about hope-filled transitions. So in this edition we offer you some thoughts, activities and a prayer about making this journey, this transition to your new life.

In This Issue

In this edition we offer some thoughts related to Easter. Our theme is "Rising to the Challenge."

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Is Volunteering a "Rite of Passage" for You?

It seems that all the world's great heroes have gone through a rite of passage:

David, a mere adolescent, slew the giant Goliath and became king of Israel, Alexander the Great solved the riddle of the Gordian Knot and became king of Macedonia. Hatshepsut sponsored a world-class trade mission and succeeded as the first female pharaoh of Egypt. Frodo completed the arduous epic journey and became king of the box office.

In a less dramatic way, each person faces challenges, overcomes personal hurdles, "grows up" and takes his or her rightful place in society. For some, the volunteer year(s) is central to their "rite of passage."

If you have not already thought about your volunteer experience as a "rite of passage", you may want to turn to page 4 and complete the activity.

Activity: Challenge Yourself! We Dare You.

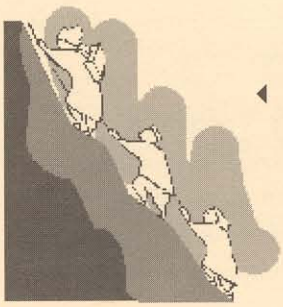
Rationale: Part of "rising to the challenge" is being thoughtful about your challenges and creative about how you respond to them. Challenges can be excellent, if they don't do you in first. Make a list (column) of approximately 10 challenges facing you now or in the near future. Be specific.

Examples might include: to get through this volunteer year, to decide where you go from here, to find a job, to make a living, to make an edible dinner, to get along with a certain problem person, to find a place to live, to get into or stay in shape, get regular physical exercise, pray daily, etc..

Share: To the extent you feel comfortable, share your list with others in your community. This might give you some good ideas to add to your list.

Increase your awareness of your personal challenges:

Put an **I** next to those which came from inside yourself.
Put an **O** next to those that came from outside you.
Put a **W** next to those you worry about.
Put a **NS** next to those you don't sweat.
Put an **L** next to any that you like.
Put a **D** next to any you dislike or hate.
Put an **LL** next to your favorite challenge.
Put a **DD** next to the challenge you like least.



Do community life and volunteer service feel like this sometimes?

In order to grow and develop, each of us needs at least one challenge we can work toward achieving. From your list above, choose one you specially want to work on. Decide on your strategy. Share your thoughts with the group or ask someone to be your 'coach' and help keep you on track.

The Way of the Cross ...

We have taken the traditional Stations of the Cross and created new reflections for each station. You can use this reflection as a community activity or a personal reflection. Consider writing your responses to the questions on a separate sheet or journal.

Jesus is condemned to death

Jesus was condemned to death and in accepting this fate, he became one with all humanity (See www.deathpenaltyinfo.org for more information on the death penalty in America). The death sentence Jesus received was society's response to the perceived threat he posed. How is Jesus' sentence similar to that of those condemned today? How are the society and the powers that be of Jesus' time similar to those today?

Jesus takes up the cross

Christian people throughout history have used violence to solve conflicts or to gain power. Instead of reacting violently to the violence of his arrest, sentencing and ultimately the cross, Jesus resists and confronts his torturers with words and non-violence. Jesus' taking up the cross flies in the face of history's fascination with power and violence. Read works written by or about modern non-violent leaders such as Ganhdi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day. To what ends did they promote non-violence and why? How can we, as followers of Jesus, respond non-violently to the conflicts we face? Is non-violence a viable option in transforming international/societal conflicts?

Jesus falls three times

The falls are mentioned three times in the traditional stations of the cross. Think of the times that you have fallen under the weight of a burden during your volunteer experience. What did you learned from those experiences? Also, reflect on the people you serve and their struggle as they try to live dignified lives. How have you dealt with being so close to the poor and witnessing their burdens? When have you been discouraged by someone's failure to get on "the right track"? How has working with the poor affected your notion of "failure" and falling?

Jesus meets his Mother

Mary watches her son being condemned to death and executed in a torturous way. The title Mary Mother of Sorrows originates from the image of Mary as a sorrowful, powerless witness to her son's extreme pain. Unlike his other followers, her experience of Jesus included memories of a childhood and a life from its very beginning.

Many mothers today watch their children fall prey to gang violence, political repression and war, and currently over 30 countries experience conflict. Reflect on the fact that each victim of international conflict or societal upheaval has a family, a life of memories and a unique humanity.

Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross

Simon is faced with a stunning situation. The Roman authorities force him to aid a condemned man presumably in order that the man live to experience the full-torture of crucifixion. In a sense, Simon is forced to participate in Jesus' torture. One can imagine an embarrassed, even humiliated Simon. Have you ever been in a similar, but maybe less dramatic, situation? Reflect on what it must have felt like for Simon, the "passer by." Have you ever been caught off guard by a beggar on the street? How is this situation similar to that of Simon and what feelings, thoughts or questions did it evoke in you? Can we afford to be value-neutral in the face of evil?

Christ's face is wiped by Veronica

Concrete acts of compassion are priceless, especially when they are courageous. Although there is no scriptural basis for this station, try to picture a woman stepping out from the taunting crowd to wipe the face of Jesus. In what ways can you be a similarly courageous, compassionate presence for the poor? In what ways is this different than advocacy? When has someone showed you a similar act of compassion and how did it make you feel? Where do you see the true face of Christ?

... A Reflection

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Jesus stops and recognizes the weeping women of Galilee who were following him along the way. They react in a way that is different from the rest of the crowd. What do you think the women understood about Jesus' suffering and execution that the rest of the crowd did not? The compassion of the women is their ministry towards Jesus. How can we better understand women's gift to the Church and society in light of this passage?

Jesus is stripped of his garments and abused.

Jesus was tortured and endured what today we call human rights abuse. However, the torture Jesus experienced is not unique to him or the time he lived in. According to Amnesty International's report in 2002: people were "disappeared" or remained "disappeared" in 33 countries; people were reportedly tortured or ill-treated by security forces, police or other state authorities in 106 countries; and people were arbitrarily arrested and detained, or in detention without charge or trial in 54 countries (See www.amnesty.org.). Our world today includes thousands of torture survivors who lived to tell their story. Pray for the abused and tortured; and pray that we never stand by when a person's rights are abused.

Jesus is crucified

Jesus' crucifixion is unique in salvation history. Jesus was killed however, because his message threatened the powers that be and because he had the courage and will to express the good news, without fear. In our own faith, from Jesus' crucifixion down to the year 2000, it is estimated that 69.5 million Christians died because of their faith with 45 million of those deaths in the 20th century alone. Of course persecution of all religions has been a part of our world since time immemorial with Christians often acting as the perpetrators (e.g. the Crusades). One only has to think of the Holocaust of Jews in the last century in a Christian country. May this heavy history permeate and inform our quest for tolerance and love among people of all faiths and within our various faith traditions.

Jesus dies

When someone we love dies, the tendency is to remember their contributions, their love and the message their life conveyed in order to make sense of the death. However, it is especially hard to make sense of it all when someone dies an unexpected or violent death. The apostles were surely in this position after Jesus died. May the fact that Jesus died compel us to look back on his teaching and the message or "good news" he preached. May we not stop at his death, but rather focus more on his message as a real meaning for our lives. Perhaps with a deeper understanding of Jesus' life, we may integrate his death into a larger, more meaningful context and message.

Jesus' body is taken from the cross

Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for the body of Jesus and takes it down from the cross to be buried. By the Gospel accounts, it seems that Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, a member of the council who had not consented to the execution, and a secret disciple of Jesus. One can imagine that his action was a risk to his position and reputation. Have you ever risked anything for your faith? What do people in other parts of the world risk for their faith? How does the freedom of faith affect your attitude towards it? Pray for those who are not free to practice their faith, that we all seek the non-violent path towards greater justice.

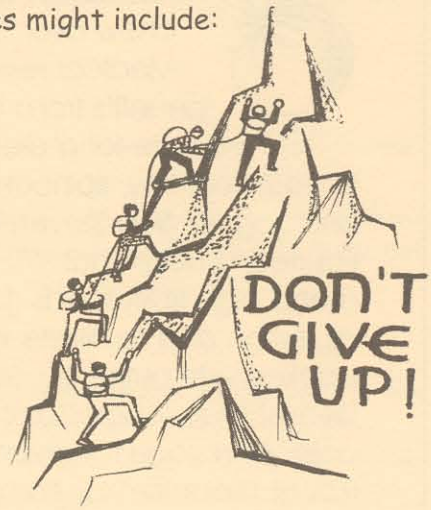
Jesus is laid in the tomb

With Jesus dead and in the tomb, it was a dark, ambiguous time for his apostles and followers. In hiding and with their grief, how could they have comprehended the significance of such a loss? They had given their lives to Jesus and his message. They could do little but accept the reality before them. And it is like that for us sometimes, not knowing the road ahead, having to accept the ambiguity of life and faith. We all face moments of despair when everything seems lost and meaningless. Perhaps you've wondered once or twice this year why you had given yourself to your particular volunteer program- why you had decided to give up so much to serve. Faith is about accepting the ambiguity, staying in the "tomb" and ultimately finding meaning there. Let us have the courage to at least acknowledge the ambiguities in us and in our lives and to stay with them in order to learn. Resurrection happens. ✙

VOLUNTEERING, MY RITE OF PASSAGE?

Instruction: This activity can be done by the entire volunteer community or with some adaptation by individuals.

Invite volunteers or community members to take a few minutes and privately make a list of some of the 'rites of passage' through which they came when they were younger. Examples might include:



Making your first confession to a priest?
Making it onto an athletic (drama or debate) team?
Feeling accepted by a peer group?
Getting your driver's license?
Graduating from high school? College?
Going out on a first date by yourself, not in a group?
Experiencing your first "break-up" with a significant other?
Having your first alcoholic beverage outside the home?
Getting carded for the first time?
Getting your first paycheck?
Going away from home for the first time?
Going overseas for a long journey?
Overcoming some personal challenge?
Others (explain) . . . ?

Instruction: Then ask each volunteer or community member to read aloud his or her list, to the extent s/he feels comfortable doing so.

Instruction: After listening to everyone's list, invite each person to **pick one** of the more significant rites of passage he or she experienced and privately answer the following questions:

What were the primarily feelings I had at that time of the event (fear, doubt, confusion, determination, excitement)?

Was there something about my own character which I felt needed to change if I was going to be able to rise to the occasion?

During or after the transition experience, do I remember feeling as though I was somehow changing or becoming a different person? Explain.

Instruction: Next, ask everyone in your community:

To what extent do you feel this volunteer experience is like a rite of transition for you? To what extent has this volunteer experience been a personal challenge?

What have been some of the surprises along the way?

What shift, if any, do you notice in what you value or care about?

What has prompted you to question your identity, values or future direction?

Conclusion

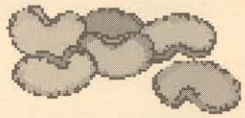
If, in light of this exercise, you've gained a sense that volunteering is somewhat of a rite of transition for you, a next question could then be: To what am I transitioning? To some extent, your future is a matter of your personal choice. So ask yourself: Where do I want to be headed from here? What are some challenges or transitions facing me down the road?

If volunteering is not a rite of transition for you, what events in your future might be? Choosing a career? Marriage? Parenthood? Vocation (however defined)? Share your thoughts with friends and people who know you, and ask for their feedback.

Superfoods to the Rescue

Volunteers can benefit from taking advantage of *superfoods*

Many volunteers pay close attention to their diet whether because of sparse finances or "eating simply so others may simply eat." Here's another reason to chew over: the long-term effects of so-called *superfoods*. Ever hear of them? Medical researchers have consistently found life-saving and disease-fighting benefits from certain foods. A recent book recommended 14 items as the basis for your life-long diet. They included: beans, blueberries, broccoli, oats, oranges, pumpkin, salmon, soy, spinach, tea (green or black), tomatoes, turkey, walnuts and yogurt. See Steven Pratt, MD and Kathy Matthews SuperFoods RX: Fourteen Foods That Will Change Your Life. Some researchers recommend high fiber foods (beans, oats and veggies) which fight cancer, slow digestion and facilitate weight control. Blueberries, especially the skin, are packed with nutrients. Soy foods (tofu, soy milk, soy nuts and green soybeans) lower cholesterol. Walnuts provide plant-based omega-3 fatty acid, and yogurt is great for calcium. See also "Nut Consumption and Risk of Diabetes" by Parker et al, JAMA. 2003; 290: 38-39.



Yes, beans are good for your heart, but are they recommended for community living?!

So stock up on those superfoods and enjoy the challenge of incorporating them into your daily diet.

Super-Food-Healthy Stir-fry Recipe

Here's a recipe you can use to put your super-foods list into practice.
This recipe serves 2 generous portions, so double or triple if needed.

Ingredients:
4 tablespoons soy sauce; 1 tablespoon sesame oil; 1 tablespoon dry sherry; 2 tablespoons water; 1 teaspoon sugar; pinch of red pepper flakes; 1 tablespoon vegetable oil; 3 cloves minced garlic; 2 teaspoons peeled and minced ginger (or ginger powder); 15 ounces tofu, firm, drain and cut into 1/2 inch pieces; 3 cups broccoli florets, cut into small pieces; 1/3 cup carrots, peeled and chopped; 3/4 cup chopped green bell pepper; 4 ounces sliced white button mushrooms; 1 tablespoon cornstarch; walnuts or peanuts optional.

Directions: Make the sauce for the stir fry by mixing the soy sauce, sesame oil, sherry, water, sugar, and red pepper flakes. Separate the ingredients for the stir fry in different bowls as follows: the garlic and ginger together; the tofu, the broccoli and carrots together; and the green pepper and mushrooms together.

Heat a large pot over high heat, add half the oil and, when hot, quickly add the garlic and ginger. Stir fry for 30 seconds, add the tofu, and stir for a couple of minutes. Add a little of the sauce mixture to the tofu, stir, and remove to a clean bowl.

Heat the remaining oil in the pot and add the broccoli and carrots. Stir for a minute, add a couple of tablespoons of water, and keep stirring until the broccoli is bright green. Add the green pepper and mushrooms next and stir fry for another couple of minutes. Next add the sauce and the cooked tofu mixture. Mix the cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of water in a small bowl, add this to the pot, and stir for another minute.

You can serve this dish with toasted peanuts, almonds or walnuts on top!

Biblical Reflection: Easter is not for spectators

Easter Sunday is coming soon, so we chose "Rising to the Challenge" as the general theme of this *Shared Visions* issue. In this biblical reflection we offer a few connections between Christ's resurrection on the first Easter Sunday morning and each person's spiritual development. Perhaps they will spark some insights about "resurrection" that will help you with your own spiritual development.

The Church's earliest writers wanted everyone to connect their lives to Christ's resurrection. Importantly, they taught that by his death and resurrection, Christ made heaven possible for us. But there are further connections. St. Paul saw each person's baptism as an entrance into Christ's resurrection. Paul taught that when adults are baptized, their immersion into the pool of water represents a death to sinful self, and then their rising is a pledge to actively follow in Christ's footsteps (Romans 6:13). The problem today is that most Christians baptized as infants know that they were passive, perhaps even sleeping when they *received* baptism. So, many of us need a paradigm shift to re-imagine our daily lives as a way of actively living out our baptism into Christ's resurrected life.

The gospel of Matthew supports this view that baptism calls us to rise, to get ourselves in gear and "to produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume" (Matt:3:9) that we can sit back and enjoy some imagined privilege. St. Luke also urges us to "rise up." He contrasts the baptism given by John the Baptist "in water" with that of Jesus "in the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:16-17). Imagine: to what extent is your life lived with fire, with passion? When in your life have you experienced *fire*, metaphorically speaking? What are some needs or challenges today to which you feel you need to rise? Tomorrow? Happy Easter. ✠

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The mission of the St. 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 Oakland, CA. 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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