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* —

Cherishing Your Volunteer Experience Today and Tomorrow

Savoring the Moments

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As the weeks and days of your volunteer experience wind down, take some time to savor the special moments that have defined your life as a volunteer. Maybe it was that time when...

- someone welcomed you into his/her home and treated you like "family."
- you made dinner for your community and it was a complete disaster but lots of fun!
- you were deeply frustrated and angered by an injustice that you encountered.
- you took in a quiet sunset on the front porch.
- your community had a conflict that definitely wasn't funny at the time, but now you can look back and laugh.

The list can go on and on. There is something important about recognizing those moments, naming them, cherishing them and carrying them forward with you as you prepare to leave your volunteer world and move into something new.

In this edition of *Shared Visions*, we offer you several activities as ways of "savoring the moments" of your volunteer experience.

We hope you enjoy taking a look back over your entire volunteer experience, finding the treasures, cherishing the moments and beginning to vision your future dreams.

"Savoring the Moments" Activities for Your Community

*As a light-hearted and fun community activity, gather together and ask each person to write down on a sheet of paper one of the funnier moment s/he recalls during his/her volunteer experience. When everyone has completed this, go around the circle and have each person share his/her story. Or, if you are more adventurous, instead of simply telling the stories, have each person act out their story if it was a "community moment" that others will recognize. Turn it into a game of charades based on your community's funniest moments!

*Invite your community to come up with a list of foods that you associate with your volunteer experience. Plan an evening in which as a community you prepare a meal using these foods. Feel free to invite neighbors, friends from work, community support people and anyone else to join in this celebration of food, faith and friendship!

For a more reflective evening, gather the volunteer community for a "Savoring the Moments Reflection and Ritual." Below is a suggested outline, but as always, modify to fit your community by using your own words and ideas.

Opening Song: One of your community's favorites

Opening Prayer: Companioning God, grant me peace of mind and heart as I reflect on the past to see the ways You have been with me. May I look with a clear, inner eye and become aware of how you have both comforted and challenged me on my journey. I want to celebrate Your companionship through the numerous twists and turns that have been mine. Speak to the pilgrim part of my heart. Encourage me to find the many, many aspects of my life that call me to gratitude and wonder. Remind me often that I am, indeed, a pilgrim on the way home to you. I need not be afraid of the wilderness and the moments of feeling lost, for you always there as a loving Guide and Companion.

I remember:
My Egypt situations of unfreedom that I have been able to leave behind,

My burning bush moments when my faith was affirmed and my work renewed,

My parting of the sea when I made it through difficulties and challenges,

My companions who aided me in my wilderness times of doubt and confusion,

My manna and quail that sustained my desert hunger and nourished me,

My fire and cloud of other's steady fidelity that assured me of God's nearness,

My hope in reaching the promised land of deeper peace, newfound joy and a renewed sense of purpose.

Leader invites all to spend time in quiet reflection, considering the question: What is one moment/thing that I truly cherish about my volunteer experience? After a few moments of silence, allow each person the opportunity to a story/reflection.

Closing Prayer: Gratitude, yes, for all the big things that stand tall, thick with abundance, joy, fruitfulness. I cannot help but applaud their presence.

But deep thankfulness for the bite-sized pieces of my life? I had not thought of them, those little snippets of time so easily consumed in the hurry and blur of pretentious days. The little moments assumed and presumed, slip quickly through the fingers of my busy life.

November gestures with a wrinkled brown hand, beckons me to wisely consider those fleeting moments of grace, in things quickly passing:

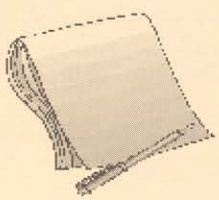
a walk on the musky-wooded path, a cup of coffee silently savored, a birdsong in the squeaky hours of dawn, the gentle touch of a liver-spotted hand, a loving letter from a grateful stranger, a fading crescent moon in a royal blue sky.

I return to gather finely layered remnants like these in the come and go of my days, and discover, with surprise, how quickly my inner room is a harvest place of gold. Amen.

Reprinted with permission from *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems and Reflections for Every Season* by Joyce Rupp, OSM

For a personal reflection, take some time out by yourself to ponder the following.

- List the names of the people who have been the most significant for you during your volunteer service. After completing the list, go back and write a word that describes or characterizes that person. Then, remember a significant moment that you shared with that person. Finally, before you leave, go back through and look to see if there are people that you wish to thank or connect with in a special way. Plan to do so.
- The most memorable moment for me in my work as a volunteer was when. . .
- The most memorable moment for me involving community life was. . .
- When I think back on my entire volunteer experience, some of the most vivid images that stand out for me are. . . some of the most vivid smells are. . . some of the most vivid tastes are. . .
- One of the insights that I have had during my time as a volunteer is. . .
- Some of the things that I am most grateful for are. . .
- Some of the things that I will miss are. . .
- Some of the things I will NOT miss are. . .
- One story that illustrates my time as a volunteer is. . .



Who you were, who you are, and who you want to be

As a volunteer, you have had a unique opportunity to see the world from a different perspective. Perhaps you've ministered to those living with AIDS or helped to provide social services for low-income families in an urban area. In your own way, you have experienced life differently.

We invite you to reflect upon your year(s) of service by starting at the beginning.

Think back to those first few weeks and remember **who you were**...

How would you describe who you were as you entered volunteer service?
What were your reasons for wanting to volunteer?
What were some of life's questions that you wanted answered?

At this point in your service, reflect on **who you are**...

How have you changed in the course of one year (or two, or more)?
How have your priorities and values shifted?
For which questions were you able to find answers?

Look forward and think about **who you want to be**...

What questions remain to be answered?
What wishes or hopes do you have for the future?
What steps can you take to help make those dreams come true?

As you approach the final weeks and months, continue to explore these questions and the others that are in your heart. Taking the time to remember will help you to fully cherish your volunteer experience.

Positive Imagery

Think of five dreams you have for the future. Keep in mind that it is important to approach this activity with optimism. Try to center your thoughts and allow yourself the freedom to imagine without limitations. Envision the future with hope. You may dream of finding a job you enjoy that doesn't compromise your values, continuing your education in an environment that gives you the freedom to explore beyond the classroom, or finding a community where you feel "at home." Whatever it is that you hope for, write it down in a journal.

This is a form of positive imagery. By writing down your dreams, it becomes easier to act upon them because they are no longer only in your head. Through journaling, you have made your dreams present and real. William Marts, the founder of The Imagination Institute, a personal ministry website, offers some widsom about positive imagery. He suggests that if we let go of our tendencies to be bound by limitations, then we can open the doors for a more positive and harmonious balance within ourselves.

For more information, see http://www.som.org/5A&S/imaginaton.htm

Positive imagery can help move you toward a choice for positive actions. One example is to **each day** record your hopes for the future . Whether it is one, five, or fifty, set aside time daily to be present to your hopes. When you realize that what you imagine is possible, then you can take the necessary steps in fulfilling your dreams.

Sweet Dreams!

Make the Most Out of The Pallotti Center Re-Entry Resources

Please learn about our free services, and make the most of the opportunities and resources available to volunteers in re-entry! Get connected with the increasingly large community of former volunteers, and strengthen one of our most valuable strengths — the community of "formers."

To access these services please visit our website page for former volunteers at www.pallotticenter.org/Former/index.htm or contact the national office of the Pallotti Center at 1-877-VOL-LINK or 202-529-3330 in the DC metro area.

staying connected is a free quarterly newsletter for former volunteers, with each issue focusing on an aspect of volunteering (simple living, social justice, spirituality, relationships, transitions, financial stewardship, etc.) and how this can apply to life after service.

The Job Bank Our *Job Bank* aids former volunteers in their search for meaningful and fulfilling work. It consists of a starter kit containing articles, resources, and strategies for career discernment and job searching, and a weekly email of job announcements which we send to interested former volunteers.

Join The Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners Since its inception in 1994, over 1,200 former volunteers have joined this alumni database of lay volunteers, managed by the Pallotti Center. Once former volunteers have signed on to the Network by supplying their contacts and volunteer experience information, as well as their job fields and willingness to gather or organize gatherings, other former volunteers in their area can request that information from the Pallotti Center. In this way "formers" can be linked first and foremost to each other, but also to social gatherings, discussion or prayer groups, couples groups, as well as with help in employment leads and contacts. The database will not be used for fundraising or spam mail.

The "What's Next?" Notebook The "What's Next?" Notebook helps guide the transition after volunteer service. It contains questions to help you reflect both on your volunteer experience and your future hopes, dreams, and goals. It also contains some practical suggestions for taking your next steps as a former volunteer, eg., re-entry self-evaluation, resume and interview tips, discernment resources, reflection questions and exercises on career direction, ideas on how to remain active in your faith, social justice, the Church, your community, etc. Master copies are sent each year to program directors, and Former Volunteers can request a copy from them, or read the on-line version on our website.

Our **Gatherings of Former Volunteers** take place in the NYC area and the Washington/Baltimore area. Other cities such as Chicago, Portland, Philadelphia and St. Louis also have gatherings of former volunteers. Contact the Pallotti Center for more information.

One-on-one support. The transition following a term of service can be a trying time. In addition to the various resources and services provided, former volunteers might benefit from talking with someone who understands the challenges involved and can offer some feedback regarding personal career decisions, life path choices, and the like. Call or stop in any of the Pallotti Centers for help today!

WWW.PALLOTTICENTER.ORG Check out the different features on our website, including the: *Resources in Your Area* section with an extensive listing of all kinds of resources in areas all across the U.S. *The Discussion Forum/Housing Board* was created it to give prospective, current and former volunteers a forum where they can get connected with one another. Current events, are also posted on a separate page.

Biblical Reflection: Do You Think God Plays Favorites?

Volunteers and lay missionaries who have served in another culture typically have grown in tolerance and in the ability to see the world from that second culture's point of view. So as you leave your program and return 'home,' know that you bring a skill greatly needed in today's world. Headlines tell tragic stories of Palestinians against Jews, Taliban battling Afghani police and the U.S. military fighting insurgents. Beyond these hot conflicts, other ethnic and national tensions continue to simmer between Russia and Chechnya, Pakistan and India, Hutu and Tutsi, China and Taiwan, etc. There's so much strife in the news it sounds a bit like biblical times. Military battles prevailed in the Jewish scriptures. Also religious strife between Jews and Christian Greeks was a major theme in the New Testament. St. Paul, a first-generation Christian, saw these as basic human problems and he had a partial solution: realize that God favors no one nation or tribe, neither Jew nor Greek (Romans 3:30). Paul even argued that Abraham was loved by God while he was yet a pagan (Romans 4:10). Abraham had God's blessing when Abraham was uncircumcised and so was not officially Jewish, and certainly not a member of any 'chosen race.' Today's Christians, Muslims and Jews alike claim Abraham as their common ancestor. Would peace have more of a chance if religious and political leaders of nations and ethnic groups questioned the commonly held view that God loves them best, over all others?

- To what extent do you see this view (God playing favorites) as contributing to violence and war?
- To what extent do you consciously believe or assume God favors Christians or one nation over others? (See Acts 10:34)
- When you discuss world events with friends, what do you see as the main causes of these ethnic and national struggles?
- How might your relationship to God (and to 'strangers') change if you challenged the belief that God played favorites?

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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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