

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Fifteen, Number One

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

Volunteers' Participation in Creation: Tools for the Journey

Welcome, volunteers!

- and welcome to the first issue of our 15th year of Shared Visions, written by former volunteers for current volunteers. Shared Visions comes four times a year to help you reflect on your volunteer experience and to provide you with tools for reflection, community activities, prayer ideas, and more.

We welcome any comments, questions, or suggestions from you, the volunteers that we serve - just e-mail us at:

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Struggling with your place in the grand scheme of things? This issue of Shared Visions hopes to help you sort out how you can see yourself as being one of the creators of our world.

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When you think of

“Creation”

Do you think of it solely as an event in the past, or also as an ongoing process?

Do you think of it solely as an 'act of God', or also as needing your enthusiastic participation?

This issue of Shared Visions invites you to see your period of service as a time for sharpening your vision of yourself as a co-creator with God in the ongoing process of creation, empowering the poor and rebuilding your environment. **No small task this.**

So please use the following activities with fellow volunteers or adapt them for your individual use to help hone your creative vision and skills.



ENJOY!

How

Did I

Get

Here?

For every volunteer there is the question, “What led me here?” There are many people and events that have helped shape our lives. Often times we experience something in particular that opens our eyes to the injustices of the world and that creates a passion within us to want to make things better.

This activity invites you to remember the events in your life that helped lead you to volunteer or missionary service. For those of you who live in community, we encourage you to do this activity as a group so that you can benefit from learning a little about each other’s motivation for becoming a volunteer.



Part 1 – Individual Reflection

Reflect back to some experiences you’ve had when you felt *awakened* as a result. It may have been an alternative spring break you had in college, a high school retreat, or a visit to a homeless shelter with your parents when you were a child. Of these experiences, which one *most impacted* your decision to become a full-time volunteer? (If several experiences come to mind, please select the one that affected you most.)

With that particular experience in mind, find a quiet space and spend some time reflecting on these questions at the top of page 3.

Here’s a Method to Your “Madness”

Ever come across a situation in which you see someone being treated unjustly? The question then becomes: How should I respond? Beyond getting angry, the next question arises: What, realistically, can I do to help make a difference?

Well, here’s a method to your righteous “madness”. It comes from a blend of suggestions made by staunch advocates for social justice, including the South American Paolo Freire (conscientization) and the North American Bernard Lonergan (insightful conversion). Many volunteers have found it helpful, and some volunteers have made it their personal life-long method for responding to local and global injustices.

It guides you through three stages of questions and response:

- **What am I experiencing in the here and now?**
- **How can I make sense and understand what I experience, and is my understanding accurate?**
- **How can I, over the long haul, use my gifts to consistently respond to injustice?**



You can reflect on these questions any way you’d like. Group members can first reflect on them on their own, and then bring their reflections up in the group, or the group can discuss them as they come. Don’t feel too much pressure to give a full answer to every question; these are big questions that you might need some time to truly answer for your own satisfaction. Plus, community activities can’t take forever! Try for no more than fifteen minutes per question set. If you are on your own, or you would like to do this activity as a personal reflection, simply follow the questions in order.

(continued from the top of page 2)

- What kind of setting were you in? What did you see..., hear..., feel...?
- Who were the people you met through this experience? What were their stories?
- What insight or understanding did you gain about the experience of the poor?
- How was your view of the world affected in terms of the systems and structures that contribute to social, political, and economic injustice?
- What shifts occurred in terms of your faith, ideology, and life goals?
- How did this experience fuel your desire to help others?



Part 2 – Community Sharing

Share with your fellow volunteers how this initial *awakening* influences the work you do each day as a volunteer. How can you, and your fellow volunteers, use these experiences to help fuel your motivation to serve in the months/years ahead?

As you continue on your journey throughout this year, it is important to remember that the work of a volunteer is not done alone. You are a part of several generations of volunteers from many different organizations. This community is formed from these shared *awakening* experiences. Remember this each day as you continue to learn and be inspired by the people you serve who, in turn, serve you.

Question Set #1: What do I see?

What do you see around you where you volunteer? At first, try not to characterize anything, just describe individual sights, sounds, people, objects, and events as they occur to you. What stands out?

What don't I see? To what extent are you not able to see as much as you'd like? To what extent are there things missing that you had expected would be there?

Question Set #2: What's wrong with this picture?

If what you see doesn't match what you expected to see, or if something is missing, why do you think that is?

To what extent do you think things should be different than they are at your location, and why? Do you think you learned how things ought to be before you came to your volunteer site, or have you learned that from the people at your location?

How do others see the picture? Think of all of the people that you interact with as a volunteer: your co-workers, the people you serve, their families, people from other organizations or agencies. What do others think about your volunteer site and their relationship with it? If you don't know, how easy would it be to find out? What might keep you from finding out what other people think?

If others' experiences of your volunteer site differ from yours, why do you think that is?

Question Set #3: What can I do to change the picture?

At first, don't focus on making large-scale changes just yet, but keep in mind the way you'd like things to change, and envision small steps toward that goal. Is there something simple you can do to bring helpful change to your volunteer site? Is there something you can say that someone else can't? How might you help someone with something they're struggling with? How can I put my faith perspective into practice in this situation? Now for a challenge: What can you do to make lasting changes at your volunteer site?

What can I do to change my place in the picture? To what extent do you think you yourself need to change? How difficult would it be to change, and is there someone who could help you make that change? Be good to yourself – allow yourself to ask someone else for that help.

Biblical Reflection:

Seeing Yourself as a Co-Creator with God

The renaissance genius Michelangelo not only had artistic talent, but he also had insight and a big secret. When Pope Julius II commissioned this renowned sculptor to paint the entire ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo accepted with great reluctance and retaliated by embedding a secret message in the background of the 'Creation of Adam' portrait at the very center of the ceiling. Its meaning was not discovered and published until 1990 when a medical student recognized that Michelangelo had placed the image of God the Creator within an anatomically exact likeness of the human brain. Had that been discovered in Michelangelo's day, his life would have been endangered for his having this forbidden anatomical knowledge. Dissecting corpses, which he stealthily did, was *verboten*.

But what exactly was his message and how might it pertain to a volunteer's spirituality? Several interpretations are possible. The painting's background for God the Father shows that in this moment of the creation of Adam, God is acting from within the human brain. This could suggest that God's action of creation continues today when people exercise their God-given mental abilities. Perhaps it is 'decision making' which provides today's creative touch? Furthermore, Michelangelo paints the Creator surrounded and intermingled with males and females of diverse ages. This could suggest that creation is not the act of an isolated individual, even if the actor is God the Father. Rather, creation arises from a community, in which divinity and humanity are practically inseparable.



Using this world-famous provocative painting as a springboard, ask yourself the following questions about your own spirituality. Then, if you feel comfortable, share your response with friends and fellow volunteers/missioners.

- **What are a few ways in which you personally are contributing to the re-creation of humanity?**
- **How, for example, does your volunteer service contribute to this process?**
- **Which decisions have you made which have been most central to this?**
- **In which ways are you collaborating with others in this endeavor?**
- **Read the Bible's first and second chapters of Genesis which contain different portraits of how God created humanity. The first (1:26) implies God created Adam and Eve in the same momentary event from nothing. The second (2:7) describes God creating humanity as a process by using clay to initially form Adam and then draw Eve from Adam's rib. What are some of the more important events or processes in your life that have helped shape who you are today?**
- **How are we to understand the responsibility to have "dominion over all things", and how do we carry it out in our time?**
- **Think about yourself as a partner with God in the co-creation of today's world. What are some implications that occur to you? Do you feel confident, for example, knowing that you are part of a much larger whole? As part of God's plan?**

How Do I See Myself Now? // How Do I Want to See Myself?

Introduction: Recent research suggests that how effective someone is in a situation has more to do with how that person sees him/herself than with brains, brawn or personality. This next activity opens the door for exploring how you picture yourself in your volunteer placement site. It can help you realize that the ultimate choice of how you see yourself is yours to make during your time of volunteer service.

O.K. You've been 'on the job' for a while now, perhaps a short while. Nonetheless, an image of yourself, how you see yourself on the job, may be emerging. We're not talking here about your ego or even about whether you have positive or negative self-esteem, important as they may be. Rather, we're referring to your conviction that your volunteer service and relationships can make an important difference in others' lives.

Because the purpose of this activity is to help you think about your image, we encourage you to be flexible and generous in how you paint your own portrait.

Your First Impressions: To what extent do you feel the following images apply to you?

Answer: '1' for definitely yes; '2' for somewhat yes; '3' mostly no; '4' definitely no

1. Usually I'm the one that makes concessions to help other volunteers. (___)
2. I think a lot about what's happening around me. (___)
3. I see myself as not having goals, except to help other volunteers achieve theirs. (___)
4. Frequently I'm the one who tries to fix problems in my volunteer placement site. (___)
5. I'm usually good at reading other people's emotions and adapting accordingly. (___)
6. Usually I work hard to get a correct understanding of how something works. (___)
7. When people say how things are, I tend to take that as the truth. (___)
8. I pay attention to what is a correct or incorrect understanding of workplace rules. (___)
9. I believe in never judging the morality of actions. They just are. (___)
10. I do make judgments about what is moral or immoral. (___)



Unscientific results: Add up your scores for the above five even numbered answers. If you received a 6 or lower, you're a great candidate as a co-creator who works at making a big difference in correcting social injustices. If you received between 6 and 9, you've got a shot at it. Higher than 10 suggests co-creating is not your cup of tea. Also, scores for the odd numbered answers probe a tendency to be more passive than active, more accepting than challenging, and more willing to follow others' agenda. If you received a total score between 6 and 10, ask yourself if you are giving too much control and power to others. Between 15 and 20 suggests you have the drive to be a strong partner in co-creating. If you want to become a more effective agent of positive change, go back and reread Activity 2 above.

Follow-up Reflections: What was this 'self-image' activity really about? The beauty of thinking about and evaluating your self-image when you are beginning your volunteer service is that you still have time to make important choices. When you recognize your earlier self-image and today make decisions about who and how you want to be, this gives you a sense of control over your efforts. Plus, you can avoid a lot of mistakes and you will be setting your own course for your future.

Sharing with fellow volunteers: Consider sharing your insights regarding your self-images. Also, consider the plusses or minuses of the following descriptions of yourself. Be careful - some are tricky while others are archetypal:

ENABLER Helper Rescuer HERO Crusader

What are some other, more appropriate descriptions of you that come to mind? To what extent are you comfortable with them? How would you change them, if at all? Ideally speaking, how do you want to see yourself? Concerning your effectiveness, what do you want to help make happen? How do you want to see yourself?

Recipe for a Good Time: Crepes

I know what you're thinking: Crepes? Aren't crepes fancy French food? Well, there's a reason they're street food in much of Western Europe – they're very easy (and cheap) to make! If you've made pancakes, you can make crepes – it's that simple. You can have a lot of fun with them, too, either by putting your favorite cheeses, meats, or veggies in them and making a quick meal, or by filling them with jam, fruit, syrup, or chocolate (or any combination of those ingredients) and making fun treats. What's more, they're very easy to store if you put them in an airtight container (freezer bags would work) and stick them in the freezer, but if you're living in community, I doubt if any of them will be left over!

*This recipe makes 12 medium-sized crepes; for more than four people, consider multiplying the ingredient amounts.

Ingredients:

	½ teaspoon baking powder	½ teaspoon salt
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour (if using self-rising flour, omit the baking powder and salt)		
2 cups milk	2 tablespoons butter or stick margarine, melted	
½ teaspoon vanilla	2 large eggs	1 tablespoon sugar
Butter, margarine, or non-stick spray for skillet		

1. Mix flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in medium bowl. Stir in remaining ingredients. Beat with hand beater until smooth.
2. Lightly butter 6- to 8-inch skillet. Heat over medium heat until bubbly.
3. For each crepe, pour scant ¼ cup batter into skillet. Immediately rotate skillet until thin layer of batter covers bottom. Cook until light brown. Run wide spatula around edge to loosen, turn and cook other side until light brown. Repeat with remaining batter, buttering skillet as needed.
4. Stack crepes and keep them covered. For dinner crepes and warm dessert crepes, place crepe on buttered skillet on medium heat, place ingredients on one half of the crepe (it's good to use shredded cheese, and the softer the cheese the better), fold crepe over ingredients, and cook until ingredients are sufficiently mixed and melted together. For cold dessert crepes, just spread your jam, jelly, applesauce or Nutella (mmmmm... Nutella) on the crepe and roll it up. A happy mouth awaits.

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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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