

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* —

The Lenten Journey of Volunteer Service

Easter Sunday's theme of Christ's resurrection challenges all volunteers to clarify our vision and expand our religious understandings. The activities in this issue are geared to help volunteers see their service with the poor as helping all of us journey from the margins of society to the centers of power, from the biblical wilderness of Judea to the core of power,

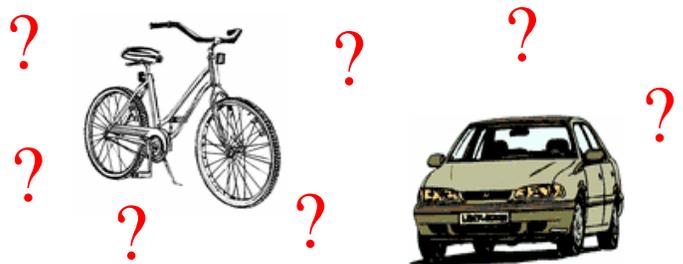
Jerusalem. Because Easter calls us to new life we provide some practical Lenten tools for the journey, including suggestions for living simply yet flexibly, avoiding extremes, and ways to celebrate a seder meal in your community as you work toward completing your volunteer service. We also provide parallels between Jesus' passion and your volunteer life.

Simple Living is Not So Simple! How to Be More Flexible

Lent is a great opportunity to reflect on how to live simply. Most volunteers can think of many instances where living simply has seemed like more of a challenge than a blessing, especially in community where being faithful to the ideals of simplicity can clash with the practical need to get along. So as an individual or as a community, take time to ask yourself: How can you be more flexible about living simply? Try these three strategies:

Exploring: Am I Doing Enough? Don't just stay at home in an attempt to save money. Explore the area where you live. Do you take walks around your neighborhood? Know where the closest library is? Find the nearby coffee shops and restaurants where you can hang out without having to drive to the next county to have a good time. This can help give you a better sense of the community, as well as show you how others make ends meet.

Experimenting: Am I Giving Simple Living a Chance? Not sure what it would be like living without TV? Don't throw the set out. Rather, send it off to "live" with someone else for a week while you try a TV-less existence. If you would like to try an alternative mode of transportation, but don't yet want to commit to buying a bike, borrow a bike for a week, and try biking to work for a change. How else could you experiment with simple living?



Educating: Am I Learning More About Simple Living from Others? – not only *how* they live simply, but *why*? If you're in community, tell each other why you think (or don't think) it's important to live simply. Does it stem from a call to solidarity with the poor, a sense of environmental stewardship, a desire to live as Jesus did, or some combination of these three? Discussion can help dispel misunderstandings and personal grudges. It can be helpful and fun to learn the reasons why members of your community make their lifestyle choices.

Finally, it's important to realize that no one person is right. As Keith Heidorn, Ph.D., says, "True simple living has no right or wrong ways, only a wide spectrum of guidelines for a process that ultimately generates contentment and fulfillment." You may have to choose only a few guidelines at a time along that spectrum, but if you stay flexible and open to other suggestions for simple living, the journey, which may be hard, will ultimately be fulfilling, not only during Lent, but for a lifetime.

In This Issue

Page 1: Simple Living is Not So Simple! How to Be More Flexible / Page 2: An Invitation to Dinner: The Seder Meal
Page 3: Your Volunteer Service: A Journey from the Wilderness to the Capital, and A Lenten Reflection for Volunteers: What to Give Up
Page 4: Living Passionately, but Avoiding Extremes / Page 5: You Can Live the Easter Experience throughout the Year
Page 6: Biblical Reflection: Easter Celebrates Surprise Transformations

An Invitation to Dinner: The Seder Meal

The Seder meal has a rich history for Christians and Jews. For our Jewish brothers and sisters the Seder is a Passover celebration of the Hebrews' Exodus, their escape to freedom after over 400 years of Egyptian slavery. For Christians, the Seder is the Passover meal that Jesus shared with His disciples on Holy Thursday, also known as The Last Supper. In the Catholic tradition, it was also the first celebration of the Eucharist when Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Several journey themes are found in the Seder meal: a journey from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from exile to the Promised Land. Jesus celebrated the Seder as a way of both foretelling His journey from death to resurrection and preparing His disciples for how they could follow in His footsteps.

As volunteers, you are familiar with the challenges of following Jesus. You witness poverty and suffering on a daily basis. Yet you are challenged to bring light, to be light for those you encounter throughout your volunteer journey. The Seder meal can be a special way to commemorate your experiences this year and help you continue to journey and be symbols of light amidst darkness.

We encourage your community to celebrate a Seder as your weekly meal together. There are lots of ways that you can prepare a Seder depending on the amount of time you have available. For further information about the Seder, an example of the ritual, and additional weblinks, including our sources for the "Elements of the Passover Seder Meal" below, please visit our website at http://www.pallotticenter.org/seder_guide.htm.

Elements of the Passover Seder Meal

Symbol	Traditional Meaning	Christian Meaning and/or Alternative Meaning
Lighting of the candle	Promise of liberation, the journey from darkness to light	Christ as the Light of the World
Wine (Yayin)	Four glasses are consumed during the service to represent the four-fold promise of redemption	1 st - Hope/Rebirth 2 nd - Liberation 3 rd - Resistance 4 th - Peace
Unleavened bread (Matzoh)	Three unleavened matzohs are placed within the folds of a napkin as a reminder of the haste with which the Israelites fled Egypt, leaving no time for dough to rise.	Eucharist which unites the Church, the Pilgrim People of God on its Journey
Lamb shankbone or chicken bone (Zeroah)	Symbolizes the paschal (Passover) sacrificial offering	Jesus, Lamb of God
Bitter herbs (Maror) Usually horseradish	Used to symbolize the bitterness of slavery	Bitterness of broken relationships
A mixture of apples, nuts, wine, and cinnamon (Charoset)	A reminder of the mortar used by the Jews as slaves in the construction of buildings	Unity of diverse cultures
A roasted egg (Beitzah)	A symbol of life and the perpetuation of existence	Easter eggs as a sign of new life
A green vegetable (Karpas) Preferably parsley or celery	Represents hope and redemption; served with a bowl of salted water to represent the tears shed	The parsley and the salt water represent how the earth and the salt of the sea are joined to help sustain life.
Empty seat and cup of wine for Elijah the prophet (Kos Eliyahu)	A symbol that all people are invited to rejoice in the feeling of freedom	The importance of making room for the stranger
Story of Exodus	Tells of the formation of a people	Story of Last Supper: John's gospel

Your Volunteer Service: A Journey from the Wilderness to the Capital

If you are serving in what some would consider a “wilderness” on the margins of society, you may be in luck. Anthropologists and biblical scholars alike tell us that there’s power in trekking into a “wilderness,” metaphorically speaking. You’ll remember, for example, that many of the world’s prophets and revolutionaries were initially marginalized. Some spent time in jail (Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, St. Paul), others in exile (Alexander Solzhenitzen, Iran’s Khomeini, Napoleon, Moses) or in a wilderness (Siddhartha/Buddha, John the Baptist). There, they clarified their identity, convictions and strategies. They were all working on their sense of direction, deciding where they were headed with the rest of their lives. Sometimes they gained a following and became empowered. They then returned to the seat of authority – the “capital” – and became national or religious leaders.

This theme surfaced in biblical theology as well. The “wilderness” of Judea, for example, is used as a biblical symbol of a wasteland on the outskirts of mainstream Israelite society. But the wilderness is inherently fertile. All it takes is a little rain and it blossoms (Isaiah 35:1-2); we’re not simply speaking here of plants, but of personal spirituality and cultural transformations as well (Isaiah 43:19-20; 51:3). John the Baptist, for example, used the wilderness as his base camp. When Jesus joined him, the gospel of St. John (chapters 3 and 4) said Jesus’ wilderness experience was the launching of Jesus’ public ministry. The first biblical reading of the coming Easter Sunday’s Mass refers to Jesus’ message spanning across this polarity, from Judea to Jerusalem (Acts 10:39).

Here are several questions you could reflect on as an individual; if you live with or around fellow volunteers, perhaps you could discuss these together.

- To what extent has your volunteer service taken you to the margins of society?
- How has it given you a new or broader perspective on mainstream society?
- In what ways is your volunteer placement site a “wilderness” experience for you?
- What have you learned from your clients, students or neighbors about those who live on the margins of society?
- What have you learned about the priorities of those who live in mainstream society?
- As you look forward, in what directions might you see your life headed?

And finally, a more challenging question: when you complete your volunteer service, what are some ways you could journey to “the capital” and become a voice for the voiceless?



A Lenten Reflection for Volunteers: What to Give Up

The Lenten season can have a different meaning for volunteers. Think about how different your life is now from just one year ago. You may be far away from home and your loved ones. You may be out of your comfort zone due to living in a new environment with a culture different from your own. These realities can sometimes leave volunteers feeling drained, especially while thinking about giving up something else for Lent.

As you think about what it means to “give up” something from the perspective of a full-time volunteer, consider the importance of giving *to* yourself so that you can better give to others.

- Give up making harsh judgments of others and yourself. Be gentle and remember that it’s okay to make mistakes.
- Give up loneliness. If you’re having trouble finding community with your fellow volunteers or co-workers, try

reaching out to a staff member of your program or by calling a good friend from home.

- Give up guilt when you feel that you have exceeded your limitations. Accept that you can only do what you can (and there’s nothing wrong with that!).
- Give up feeling like you have to push yourself to the point of exhaustion. Refuel yourself as necessary (even if this means taking more breaks!).
- Give up fear of the unknown, uncertainty of the future. Keep trusting that your faith will lead you to the right direction.
- Give up the need to give up everything. It is not selfish to have needs. Know yourself. If going for a run in the morning helps clear your mind, then make time for it. If eating ice cream helps you relax, then grab a cone.

(Adapted from www.appleseeds.org)

Living Passionately, but Avoiding Extremes

Volunteers, more often than not, have a passion within themselves, a strong desire to make a difference, serve others, live the gospel message, or create a strong community – or any combination of these! Such passions are the positive force that brings us to volunteer in the first place, but they can also lead us to extremes, creating conflicts in our personal relationships. It can be hard to figure out how to deal with people who are on the extreme end of a spectrum. Here are several challenging situations to consider, followed by guidelines to help your community resist going to extremes.



Part 1: Challenging Situations

1) One volunteer has made friends with some people from work who play poker together on Thursdays, and she has attended poker night several times. The house community night has always been on Thursday, and several of her housemates have ostracized her for having chosen something else over the community's time together. How can this conflict be resolved?

2) Two volunteers feel that the only way to fulfill their spiritual needs during community prayer is to engage in lengthy readings from the Bible. Two others feel that this is extreme and an imposition on their right to pray in their own way. How can this problem be solved?

3) In a community of four, one person is a teacher, and has the most demanding schedule. Thus, he feels a great need for quiet on school nights, in order to do well in his job. His other three housemates have been rather relaxed about having people over, socializing and playing loud music. The teacher is at the breaking point. What can be done to help?

Part 2: Suggested Guidelines

These situations can be quite unsettling, leaving you feeling as though your volunteer community is breaking apart. Nevertheless, if you can get through the uncomfortable times, these situations can also be an opportunity to strengthen your community. Even if you live alone, your relationships with others can be strengthened by taking certain steps. We offer the following guidelines to help you avoid extremist behavior and become more flexible in your relationships with others:

- ◆ **Avoid demonizing/sanctifying:** Try not to make someone else into a sinner or a saint; accept what they do and how they do it as just one example of the great variety within humanity.
- ◆ **Re-label for better relationships:** Stop using labels that don't do anybody any good, like "slob" or "twit," and re-label the people who had the old labels. It may be difficult, but you'd be surprised how much your attitude changes once that "slob" becomes "easy-going," and the "twit" becomes "light-hearted."
- ◆ **Keep the door open for communication:** Nothing breaks down a wall like a steady stream, and nothing breaks down the walls between us like a steady stream of communication.
- ◆ **Avoid snap judgments; make time for reflection:** No matter what the problem, if you can afford to spend some time reflecting on it, you will come to a deeper understanding of that problem or that person. Avoid deciding how you feel on the spur of the moment, and respond at a later time.
- ◆ **And, as always, Compromise:** It's hard work, but community is only forged when the extreme and the moderate positions meet at some closer agreement. Don't just give in to the extremist position, or agree to forget your deeply held convictions. Figure out where the two sides can meet, and find value in your ability to do so.

Part 3: Put Into Action

Choose one of the community challenges from Part 1, or identify a problem you have encountered in your community. Discuss how each of the guidelines may help ease the tension. What other suggestions do you think would help avoid extreme reactions and bring the community members into closer agreement?

The Pallotti Center wishes all volunteers and program staff a happy Easter celebration.

You Can Live the Easter Experience throughout the Year



The Christian tradition celebrates Easter as the high point and fulfillment of its entire liturgical year, even more important than Christmas. Our tradition encourages us to see Easter not so much as a single Sunday, such as March 27, 2005, but rather, as an experience lived throughout the whole year.

How do we know this? From a theological perspective, Lent's forty days of preparation end when we begin the *triduum* which celebrates the final three days of Jesus' life. His last supper on Holy Thursday, with his crucifixion on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter are a single process of passion, death and rebirth. So Easter points to more than simply a holiday. The Church holds up Easter as a many-faceted jewel, and encourages us to pursue how its many themes play out in our personal or communal lives. These themes celebrated during the *triduum* shed light on and bring hope to the struggles of daily life.

Use the suggestions below to help you explore how you can make this happen. Begin by thinking about or talking with others about your understanding of the various biblical themes. Then ask: how are they similar to the volunteers' experiences such as those listed as examples? Write any response you feel called to as a result of discussion.

The Holy Thursday Experience

Be attentive to the story and read: 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Be smart in understanding the themes: Sharing Passover meal, breaking bread/self for others' sake, Exodus' escape from slavery, communion with God.

Be decisive in recognizing similar themes in your life: Sharing a special meal with friends? Sacrificing for another's benefit? What's your experience of slavery? When do you feel close to God?

Be persistent as to which is your concern: Perhaps begin by sharing a seder meal (see page 2 for further information about the seder). Is there a slavery you want or need to escape? How will you live out your passover from slavery to freedom and to communion?

Good Friday Experience

Be attentive to the story, read: John 18:1-19,42

Be smart in understanding these themes: Dealing with violence, issues of life and death, sacrifice for others.

Be decisive in recognizing similar themes in your life: Where have you seen injustice? What has enabled it to happen? Who has been the victim?

Be persistent in your response: Are your clients victims? What can be done to bring them justice?



The Easter Sunday Experience

Be attentive to the story, read: Mark 16: 1-8

Be smart in understanding these themes: Changing death to life, to resurrection

Be decisive in recognizing similar themes in your life: When have you seen new life in your own life or your clients' lives? Gone from despair to hope?

Be persistent in your response: Where is new life needed in your or your clients' lives?

Interested in celebrating the Easter liturgies: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Here are two web resources volunteers have found helpful:

<http://www.pallotticenter.org/SharedVisions/Vol19%20No3/index.htm>

<http://www.pallotticenter.org/SharedVisions/Vol12%20No3/index.htm>.

Biblical Reflection: Easter Celebrates Surprise Transformations

Christians know that Christ's resurrection is the heart of the Easter experience. But have you noticed how Easter encourages us to rise to new understandings in how we see one another and find Christ in our lives? It's rarely discussed, but Easter highlights the theme that Jesus wants us to recognize him in the stranger, with whom he often identified himself. This was one of Jesus' central teachings (Matt.: 25:43): when you welcome the 'stranger' you welcome him. On Easter Sunday afternoon, two disciples walked at length with Christ on the road to Emmaus. To them, he was a stranger, and they did not recognize him until they broke bread together (Luke 24:14). Similarly, early that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalen initially spoke with Jesus but mistook him for being a gardener (John 20: 15). An 'Easter mindset' encourages us to be alert for the presence of Jesus in our neighbors.

- What are some break-through experiences you have had of changing your first impression of someone, such as a client, co-worker or fellow-volunteer, after getting to know that person better?
- What was it that enabled you to discard the previous image of the person, and opened the way for a new recognition of them?
- When you think about people you've gotten to know and respect, how do they show you some Christ-like qualities ?
- What are some ways your experiences of strangers have challenged you to recognize Christ?

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Editors: Andrew Thompson, Jennifer Taylor, Mark J. Torma

Production Editor: Mark J. Torma

Advisors: Rev. Frank Donio, S.A.C., Rev. Bob Kinast, Bill Lowell, Sr. Anita Joseph Reeves and **Pallotti Center Directors:** Kristelle Angelli, Joan Smith and Anita Saira Morawski.

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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.

The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center for Apostolic Development

415 Michigan Ave., NE

Washington, DC 20017

(202) 529-3330 (in DC area)

or toll-free: (877) VOL-LINK (outside DC area)

pallotti@pallotticenter.org

www.pallotticenter.org

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