

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* —

Being Decisive: Discovering What's True in Your Volunteer Experience

Full-time volunteer service puts you in challenging situations. You may work with the economically disadvantaged or with better-off clients who need help with emotional, cognitive, social, or spiritual development. You may serve in inner-city classrooms, soup kitchens, homes for the elderly or health clinics, in U.S. towns or in third-world villages.

Challenging situations lead to challenging questions: Why are these people in these situations? What keeps them in this cycle? To what extent is my volunteer program making a difference? What policies, if any, can help the people escape their constraints? How is my faith making a difference in my experience?

This year, Shared Visions is focusing on four “bees” that build a process for grappling with these and other life-questions. Our first issue suggested ways to “be attentive” to your situation. The second issue offered ideas on how to “be reflective” and develop tentative answers to important questions. This issue invites you to “be decisive,” to make judgments about those tentative answers, to determine whether your initial ideas are true or false. Enjoy the following ways to develop decision-making skills. You can do them on your own or as group activities in your volunteer community.



Is It True or False?

In this issue of Shared Visions, we invite you to explore “decisiveness” as it relates to your ability to make judgments about what is true or false in your volunteer world.



Here are three quotations to help you reflect on and discuss how you determine what is true, what is false, and the relationship between the two.

Part 1: Truth is Discovered Gradually

Heraclitus of Ephesus described truth in this way:

*Whosoever wishes to know about the world must learn about it in its particular details.
Knowledge is not intelligence.
In searching for the truth be ready for the unexpected.
Change alone is unchanging.
The same road goes both up and down.
The beginning of a circle is also its end.
Not I, but the world says it: all is one.
And yet everything comes in season.*

- What is one example of a truth you have discovered over time?

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Group Activity: Exploring Truth, From Reel to Real

There are many dimensions to the question, “How can I decide what is true and false?” For example, some people ask: Am I being true to myself? Others are more concerned about the outside world and whether they correctly understand it: Is my view of the world the way

it really is? To what extent am I living in a fantasy world?
Directions: If you have access to a VCR or DVD player, review the following list of films and, as a community of volunteers and/or friends, choose a question you want to discuss, and a film that raises it.

To what extent do I see the world as it is, or mainly as part of my fantasy life?

A Beautiful Mind

Portrays the real life story of a brilliant mathematician with schizophrenia, who struggles with the question of fantasy versus reality.

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

A classic comedy based on a novel about a man who confuses his fantasies about himself with his real identity.

What challenges me to be true to myself?

Bend It Like Beckham

A recent movie about a young British Sikh woman who loves soccer and eventually manages to pursue her true passion.

Boys Don't Cry

A true story about a young woman who insists on living life as a man. The story is inspiring, even though the real-life consequences are tragic.

What is truth?

Rashomon

A classic Japanese film in which a crime has been committed, but each witness's story seems to contradict the others. A good look into the dilemma of how to decide what is true.

Memento

A thriller about a man who has suffered a harrowing form of short-term memory loss, and the people who may or may not be helping him.

What are some imaginative ways I can be realistic about my personal dream, without giving in and selling out?

The Shawshank Redemption

The riveting story of two prisoners, one rightly and one wrongly imprisoned, whose paths to redemption and self-realization are intertwined.

8 Mile

A young rapper, played by Eminem, hopes for fame and fortune, but he slowly comes to understand that reaching those heights will take more from him than just hope.

Post-viewing discussion starter questions:

Which parts of the film did you find particularly striking?

Which aspect of “truth” did the film raise for you and how did it surface?

What new insights about truth did you gain from the film?

To what extent did the film portray the search for truth as uncomfortable or unsettling?

What experiences in your life have made you question your grasp on the truth of a situation?

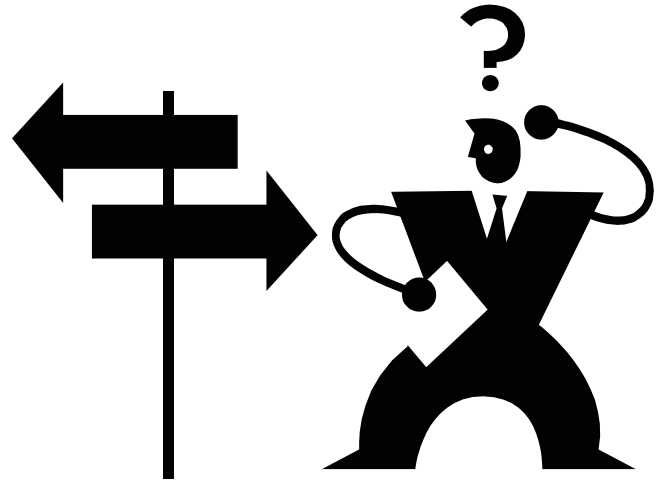
Overcoming Your Indecisiveness

For many people who tend to be indecisive, the consequences of sticking with the status quo and not making a decision often seem preferable and manageable – at least, until it’s too late. If you know you have a bit of an indecisive streak, and you fear the consequences of the decisions that confront you, don’t despair – you’re hardly alone, and you’re probably not giving yourself enough credit. Take, for example, your decision to do full-time volunteer service. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Maybe you knew you wanted to do service – or maybe you didn’t know what career path to pursue, and service seemed like a good way to spend a year. In any event, why did you specifically choose to do a year (or more) of service, and not something else? What convictions did you have that led you to that decision?
2. What consequences did you anticipate when you decided to do service? How concerned were you about being away from home and family, not seeing friends, and losing your autonomy by living in community? How did you overcome the fear and uncertainty of how you would handle those consequences?
3. What possible consequences were you concerned about? For example, did you wonder if your relatives would approve, or what your friends would think, or how it would look to future employers? How did you overcome the feeling that there might be negative consequences?

As you reflect on your answers, realize that making the transition to being a full-time volunteer is an excellent example of one time when you dealt with the consequences of making a decision. Regardless of what all of those consequences were, you did it – you made the decision, and by now you have probably grown a lot because of your experience.

Here are more decision-making tips (adapted from *Smart Choices*, by John S. Hammond, Ralph L. Keeney, and Howard Raiffa) to help you overcome your indecisiveness and build toward even more confident decision-making.



Recognize all consequences

For instance, ask yourself if you would choose the status quo alternative if, in fact, it weren’t your status quo. Ask yourself if the consequences you foresee would be true to your personal objective in life.

Explore all alternatives

Never think of the status quo and any obvious potential changes as the only alternatives. Identify other options and evaluate their pluses and minuses.

Be willing to make tradeoffs

Sometimes it’s a good strategy to make a promise or a commitment to yourself that you’ll make sure to do something later (e.g., spend time with your friends and family) in order to get or do something you value now.

Make peace with uncertainty

It’s true that you don’t know what any change may bring, but things can also change with the status quo. If you make peace with the presence of uncertainty in your life, your decisions will become a little less stressful.

Plan ahead

Be aware that the decisions you make now will impact decisions you have to make later in life. That may sound scary, but if you plan ahead and keep in mind the goals you have in life, the decisions you are making now may become easier in light of those goals.

What Moves You To Be Decisive?

The purpose of this activity is two-fold. First, we invite you to explore what moves you and stirs you to make decisions. At this point in your life, you've gone through many transitions. Through each change, you've had to make decisions. For example: when you graduated from high school, you had to decide what you were going to do next-- go to college or find a job? You also had to decide to which schools or jobs you wanted to apply. What was your motivation to make the decision that you made? How did you know that you wanted to go to college, or enter the workforce?

The example above of the transition from high school to college may make these questions easier to answer. But the decision-making process becomes more difficult when you consider the decision of what you'll do after you finish your year(s) of volunteering. Begin by asking yourself a simple question, "What do I long for?" Is it working towards social and economic justice, educating children, developing low-income housing, or continuing my education by getting another degree? How has your volunteer experience led you to new longings? What motivates you to decide what your next step in life will be?

Take some time to consider these questions and write down your answers here.

My next decisions are motivated by my desires to _____ and longing for _____.

Once you have thought about what moves you to make decisions, we invite you to assess how active you are in your decision-making. For each of the following statements, choose which best describes your approach to decision-making.

When I approach making decisions, I usually...

- hesitate at first, but am okay once I begin. (2 pts.)
- put it off until the last minute. (1 pt.)
- start planning as soon as possible. (3 pts.)

I see decision-making as...

- a little difficult because of my doubts and fears of uncertainty. (2 pts.)
- an opportunity to take risks and seek new challenges. (3 pts.)
- overwhelming and something I can do only with a lot of support and encouragement. (1 pt.)

My decision-making can best be described as...

- something that I don't really think about until I absolutely have to. (1 pt.)
- a strategy I fine-tune before I have to make a decision. (3 pts.)
- an approach I take when faced with a decision. (2 pts.)

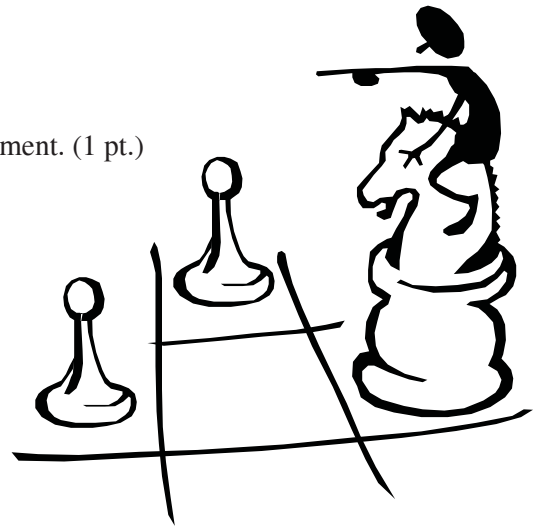
Summary: Total the points from your 3 answers. If you have a score of:
3 to 4 - You may want to consider a new approach to your decision-making.
5 to 7 - You're on your way to more active decision-making.
8 to 9 - You are an active decision-maker.

If you scored high, then you make decisions with energy and enthusiasm. You initiate the process and strive for consistency. You're also not afraid of taking risks and facing uncertainty.

Suggestion: Maintain your enthusiasm, while also maintaining a realistic approach to your decision-making. No matter how confident you may be in your decision-making, it never hurts to seek out advice and support from those close to you.

If you scored low, you are more tentative in your decision-making. It's more difficult for you to initiate the process in advance before you feel overwhelmed and not in control. What fears, if any, may be present?

Suggestion: Try to see decision-making as a life-long process. Learn to anticipate decision-making with each transition and develop a strategy to help you achieve what you long for.



Biblical Reflection: Gaining Confidence

In Your Volunteer Service

Often, when someone takes on a new job, the first year is a big learning experience which includes mid-course corrections and adjustments to one's initial hopes. Halfway through the first year of service, volunteers are able to ask themselves: Realistically speaking, am I accomplishing what I think I am accomplishing? Have I been overly optimistic? These are the "truth" questions, which help to separate the realists from those living with varying degrees of fantasy.

St. Paul referred to this process as growing up; he said that when he was a child, he thought as a child, but when he was an adult, he put aside the ways of

the child (1 Cor. 13:11). There are many ways of thinking like a child, including too much fantasy, too little confidence, and having no internal editor performing reality checks, making judgments, and asking: how truthful am I being with myself?

Here are some questions to help you, as a volunteer, to do a reality check with regard to your service and lifestyle. After answering them by yourself, consider sharing and comparing your thoughts with those of your fellow volunteers and friends. These reality checks can lead to greater confidence in how and why you are serving others.

- What are the consequences of my volunteer service? Who benefits and how?
- How is my service impacting on the lives of those I serve? To what extent is my answer objective? Would my co-workers agree?
- To what extent did I expect I'd make a big difference in their lives? If there is not that much change, to what extent have I been too idealistic?
- To what extent am I motivated to serve because I want to be loved?
- Am I truly acting because I believe in social justice or are there parts of me that are volunteering as a form of "charity?"

- To what extent do you base your understanding of truth on your own experiences?
- How does your faith influence your meaning of truth?
- How has your volunteer experience influenced what you see as truth?

Part 2: Falsehood Takes Time to Unravel

Falsehood is easy, truth so difficult.

- George Eliot

- To what extent have you experienced falsehood in your volunteer experience, or in your life?
- Do you believe that it is easier to find falsehood than it is to find truth? If so, why?
- How has your volunteer experience influenced what you see as untrue?

Part 3: Examining the Relationship between Truth and Falsehood

New opinions often appear first as jokes and fancies, then as blasphemies and treason, then as questions open to discussion, and finally as established truths.

- George Bernard Shaw

- Do you agree with Shaw's description of the progression of truth?
- What is one example of a truth you initially thought was false?
- What is the process by which previously perceived falsehoods become truths?

How do you decide?

Recipe for a Good Time: Pork Marsala

Difficulty: Easy

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

(Recipe courtesy Family Circle Magazine, as found on foodnetwork.com)

Ingredients

- 4 boneless pork loin chops (about 1 1/4 pounds), trimmed
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 small red onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup dry Marsala
- 1 1/2 cups hot cooked white rice

Place boneless pork loin chops between 2 sheets of waxed paper. Pound with meat mallet or rolling pin to 1/4-inch thickness. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add pork; cook until browned on both sides and cooked through, about 6 minutes, turning once. Transfer to platter; keep warm.

Add onion to the same skillet used to cook boneless pork chops. Cook onion over medium-high heat, until golden and tender, about 2 to 3 minutes. Add the Marsala to the onion; bring to boiling, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of skillet. Remove skillet from the heat. Spoon sauce over boneless pork chops. Serve with hot rice, cooked following package directions.

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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; 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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