

SHARED VISIONS

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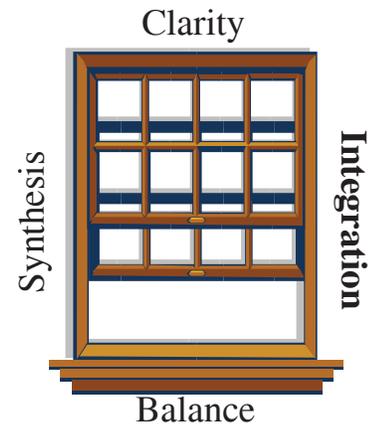
Volume 17, Number 2

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

Suggestions for Integrating Your Beliefs with Your Volunteer Experiences

Do you recall the most recent issue of *Shared Visions*? It suggested four qualities of openmindedness or four windows for viewing the open mind at work. The first issue suggested ways to strive for **clarity** in your beliefs and focused on ways to work on getting rid of stereotypes and self-contradictions. In this second of our four-part series, we focus on becoming more openminded by encouraging the **integration** of your beliefs and disbeliefs.

By **"integrate"** we mean the open mind pulls together the important information and weaves the central ideas into a pattern. The closed mind tends to allow its beliefs to be isolated from one another, like characters in a novel that never meet. Integration is like the process of identifying the main characters, developing a plot, and pulling the pieces together to make them into a meaningful pattern.



We also want to clarify what we mean by **"disbeliefs"**: namely, any ideas or notions which we fail to find credible, and thus judge to be not believable. Everyone has disbeliefs. The difference is that the open mind tends to know something about what it rejects, while the closed mind tends to remain ignorant of what it rejects. An openminded Christian, for example, learns about Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist faiths. The closedminded Christian assumes that there is no value in learning about other faiths and lives in a state of isolation. So, having a strong disbelief system means you challenge your beliefs by studying different points of view. It does not mean you have a lot of disbeliefs, as such.



Denial stops the integrating of beliefs

Another aspect of how beliefs are integrated is that the open person strives to continue learning about and deepening his or her beliefs as well as disbeliefs. A recurring example from history where this principle is not utilized is war. War often arises when people fail to recognize the humanity in their enemy, thus keeping their systems of belief and disbelief separate. However, there are examples of people integrating their beliefs and disbeliefs in order to prevent war and to establish peace. This is accomplished by recognizing the humanity of your enemy, or integrating what you believe in, humanity, with what you disbelieve in, the enemy. The Sant'Egidio community in Rome used this principle and helped end the 16 year-long civil war in Mozambique in the early 1990's (<http://www.santegidiousa.org>). Over two years, they "introduced" the warring parties to one another's humanity, and personal trust took root.

The activities which follow are designed to help you better integrate your beliefs and disbeliefs into your spirituality, volunteer setting, and community life. We hope these ideas and suggestions help to make these weeks of Advent a time for opening and increasing your awareness of God's presence in your life.

In this issue... Page 1: Suggestions for Integrating Your Beliefs with Your Volunteer Experiences // Page 2: Understanding Integration // Page 2-3: Advent 2006: Exploring the Psalms // Page 3: Cultural Integration: Overcoming Fears and Boundaries // Page 4: Biblical Reflection: Jesus' Birth - Integrating Contrasting Themes and Dialogue: A Technique for Openmindedness // Page 5: Activity: What Do You Believe? // Page 6: Recipe for a Good Time

Understanding Integration

Integration is another word for “comprehensiveness” of the belief and disbelief system, that is, how the person puts his or her beliefs together and the extent to which the person keeps learning and expanding his or her belief and disbelief systems.

This characteristic, integration, focuses on two aspects of how the person handles his or her beliefs. The first is that the person pulls the information together to gain a sense of the whole. The second is that the person works at expanding his or her knowledge of points of view, including those with which he or she disagrees.

The Open Person:

The Closed Person:

In a situation inviting high anxiety, keeps his/her cool and is not stampeded into decisions.	In a situation inviting high anxiety, tries to relieve pressure by making a quick judgment.
When judging between two opposing points of view, learns about both views, including the less credible view, before coming to a conclusion.	When judging between two opposing views, tends to learn only about the view he or she is predisposed to accept.
Feels comfortable associating with persons whose viewpoints are different from his or her own views.	Feels comfortable associating only with persons who have the same point of view.
Keeps learning what he or she “does” believe in and also what he or she “does not” believe in, and thus has clear knowledge about opposing points of view.	Typically sees little need to learn about what he or she does not believe in, and thus has murky notions of what he or she disbelieves.
Strives to gather relevant facts and ideas and then attempts to weave them into a meaningful whole.	Is comfortable operating without adequate information and with no need to pull it all together.
When developing a point of view, tends to hold the new viewpoint firmly but with flexibility, as though it were a work in progress.	When developing a new point of view, comes to a conclusion and then holds it rigidly and allows for no new information.

Advent 2006: Expl

The following is an Advent scriptural reflection designed for your community or individual prayer life. The antiphons come from the Psalms for each Sunday of Advent 2006, as prescribed in the Catholic Lectionary (all of the readings can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/>). We invite you to open yourself to the great promise and possibilities of Advent!

For many, December has become a month of consumerism and materialism, all centered around Christmas holiday sales. In the Christian tradition, however, these weeks are a time of preparation, promises, and waiting. During Advent we prepare our hearts and our homes for the coming of the Lord (Is. 40). Take a moment to center yourself in this time of anticipation, of wonder, of joy, and consider the words from Scripture.

First Sunday of Advent: To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. (Ps. 25: 1b)

With so many distractions competing for the attention of our

souls (work, despair around the world, the lure of material wealth, etc.), it becomes difficult not only to lift our souls to God, but to “lift up” our souls at all. With winter comes harsh weather in many parts of the world and shorter days - hardly uplifting. In the midst of all this, there is a promise of great joy to come (see Is. 60). Alone or with others, what are some ways to lift and uplift your souls during this time of the year?

Second Sunday of Advent: The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy. (Ps. 126:3)

It's Advent, and we're preparing for the coming of Jesus. And most likely, we're preparing for Christmas: parties to attend, goodies to bake, presents to buy; all joyful things. Likely, though, in your volunteer placement, you see things that aren't so joyful: families struggling to make ends meet around the holidays, lonely elderly citizens, and much more. The joy of those parties, goodies, and presents seems fleeting. Where's the real

Cultural Integration: Overcoming Fears and Boundaries

Have you ever been the only (insert category here) in the room? Have you been in a situation in which you are the only person of a certain age, race, gender, economic background, education level, or language ability (or lack thereof)? How did you feel? Were you intimidated? Confident? Afraid? Did you act differently? Why or why not?

During your time as a volunteer, it is likely that you have already found or will soon find yourself in a situation similar to the one described above. Whether you are living in a new country, or simply in a new county, the culture around you is probably different from the culture to which you are accustomed.

- *What are some of the cultural differences you observe?*
- *Have you noticed different traditions, or unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells? Do people interact with each other in a different way?*
- *Do people around you hold beliefs distinct from your own?*

The composite of traditions, interactions, beliefs, sights, sounds, and smells can be described as culture. An official definition of culture is 'a set of learned beliefs, values, and behaviors.'* These beliefs, values, and behaviors are ingrained in all of us from an early age, carefully taught by our family, teachers, and friends. Culture is further promoted by the government and mass media, and by the religious, social and professional organizations that provide the basic structures of society.

* <http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vcwsu/commons/topics/culture/culture-definitions/geertz-text.html>

A new cultural experience offers a contrast to one's own culture, helping us to appreciate the good—and to re-evaluate the bad.

- *To what extent has your volunteer experience provided new insights into your own culture?*

Culture can also be defined as a 'precipitate,' or a product of history. In your volunteer experience, you may go through culture shock, or you may find it difficult to understand some aspects of local culture. Learning the history of the people around you may help you to be more open to your surroundings. Even if you don't agree with some local beliefs or customs, you can come to understand local culture in a deeper way. Reflect upon the new beliefs, values, and behaviors you have encountered in your time as a volunteer. Did you react to these in a negative or positive way? Why? Even if your new experiences have been positive overall, it is natural to feel intimidated, or even annoyed by your surroundings. Rather than giving into negative ideas or stereotypes, take some time to learn more about the history, and thus the culture, of your new home. Visit a local museum or monument, read books and articles, and most importantly—take some time to listen to the stories of the people around you. Learn from their culture and history, and don't be afraid to participate in local traditions! Living in a new place is always an opportunity to observe and learn, and to integrate aspects of local culture into your own.



oring the Psalms

joy? Alone or with others, ask: Where do I derive authentic joy? What great things have been done for me?



Third Sunday of Advent:

Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel. (Is. 12:6)

brought forth through the Incarnation. We don't have to wait for Jesus' birth to see the great and Holy One of Israel. Where do you see Christ in others? Elizabeth says that the infant in her womb leapt with joy when the pregnant Mary visited her (Luke 1:41-45). To what extent do you have a similar reaction of joy and gladness when you recognize the Divine presence in the people around you?

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved. (Ps. 80:4)

The Incarnation offers us many themes to explore, one being the idea of the Divine Presence in all of us. As you near the end of this Advent journey, reflect on the ways you turn to God. In struggle? In joy? As a community? Individually? Where do we seek the face of God? Do we see His face in others?

May God bless you this Advent and always!

The ironic thing about Advent is that we're preparing for the birth of a Savior who has already come. We are a people waiting in darkness, but surrounded by the light of Christ

Biblical Reflection: Jesus' Birth - Integrating Contrasting Themes

Soon we will be celebrating Jesus' birth, and hearing the biblical story of Mary and Joseph finding shelter in a stable, the swaddled infant Jesus resting peacefully in a manger, reverential visits from poor shepherds and angels from on high. Here we have one of the most heart-warming stories in all the scriptures and secular literature as well. With the help of St. Francis of Assisi (b.1182) who popularized the use of the nativity scene, the Christmas crèche has had a powerful influence on Christian art down through history and touched how today's families celebrate Jesus' coming. The warmth and grandeur of this story has pervaded the



Catholic imagination, its art (Madonna and Child) and music (Handel's Messiah).

But there's a lot more to this story than first meets the eye. When you think about this mystery of Jesus' Incarnation, you can recognize how the

Christmas story brings together rich themes that typically we would view as opposites. Here we have humanity intimately united with divinity, earth with heaven, time with eternity, light with darkness, poverty with wealth, peace with violence, faith with politics, sin with redemption, and the holy family with the pagan magi. All of these contrasting themes are part of the nativity narrative. Perhaps part of the strength of the story is that it does include the contrasting themes and invites us to integrate these opposite tensions.

See if you can find a few moments for personal reflection or for group discussion about these themes. To which are you most strongly drawn? And how do you relate to the

contrasting theme; e.g., if you chose "light" as your favorite theme, what does "darkness" mean for you? What can you learn from your reactions to the contrast? Also, in what way is divinity emerging, being born, within your humanity? As part of your Advent preparation, consider how these contrasts can nourish your faith and challenge you to pay greater attention to your religious beliefs and how you put them into practice.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke, which give us the nativity story, contain these tensions, but they are easily missed. The stories are not cuddly documentaries; they are faith-based, theological affirmations. The gospel of Matthew, for example, refers to the infant Jesus as "the Christ," a term that came into use only well after his death and usually refers to the adult Jesus in his risen state. Similarly, Matthew tells of the gift-bearing magi asking where they can find the "king of the Jews" (2:2), a title Jesus never claimed for himself. Yet this very title so politically offended the Roman governor, Pilate, that he condemned Jesus to death (27:11) and placed this title as a criminal charge (27:37) just above Jesus' head. To this day, INRI, the Latin initials for "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews," are found on most crucifixes. Matthew has placed themes from the end of Jesus' life into his infancy. This is why we say the gospels are theological reflections, a network of beliefs and contrasting themes, rather than simple journalistic observations. By seeking out these important gospel themes, we will be better able to integrate them into our spirituality. They can also help us make sense of our daily experiences when we encounter these tensions, such as peace and violence, whether in our neighborhoods or between nations.

Dialogue: A Technique for Openmindedness

Through the course of your volunteer experience you will be faced with topics and issues that are difficult to discuss, especially with people who do not share the same perspective as you do. In community life, dating and relationships, as well as the use of alcohol, among many examples, can lead to heated debates. With the increasingly intertwined climate of faith and politics in our country, different political views can lead to the breakdown of communication, even among community members. How can one handle or even prevent this type of conflict? One method or tool that may be helpful is to engage in dialogue.

What is dialogue? **Dialogue is a method of communication that is more about listening than about talking.** This concept is key to understanding the

integration quality of openmindedness, because it is through listening that we can both learn about and be challenged by perspectives that are different from ours. **If we merely spend our time talking, then we tend only to reinforce what we already know and believe.**



How can you practice dialogue in your community? Continued on the next page are some helpful techniques to approaching dialogue.

(continued on page 5)

Activity: What Do You Believe?

Here's a Pallotti Center-spin on the old Mad Libs from childhood. Have fun with this exercise! Begin by filling in the blanks; feel free to be very honest!



All people who attend _____ are _____ because
(school you don't like) (stereotype of that school)

_____. And members of the _____
(negative quality of those students) (political party you don't associate with)

party are wrong because they all believe _____ .
(What do you think they believe?)

Furthermore, people who practice the _____ faith are peculiar
(religion/denomination other than your own)

because they _____ .
(What have you heard that they do?)



Now read your story in its entirety. How much of that is true, and how much of that is what you have overheard, made up, or been otherwise misinformed about? How well do you actually know people from your rival school, another religion, or (heaven forbid!) opposing political party?

Suggestions for Walking in Others' Shoes

It is a natural tendency to ignore what we don't believe, and pay attention only to what we agree with. This is how negative, damaging stereotypes are perpetuated, leading us to not reevaluate what we do not believe in. Write down one belief held by the other political party or by another religious denomination, which you do not share. What is the underlying value they are striving to uphold? To what extent do you hold that value? On the flip side, what is one belief the opposing political party or denomination attributes to you, but which they reject? What is the underlying value that you think they are rejecting?

Through your work as volunteers, in many ways you are choosing to break away from stereotypes. The challenge is to take advantage of spending time in another culture as well as getting to know your clients and community members in order to help you integrate various points of view and develop a more openminded perspective.

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(continued from page 4)

Techniques for Open Dialogue

(Adapted from the article, "Can We Talk? - The Importance of Dialogue in Business Organizations," found at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mODTI/is_n1_v26/ai_20313424.)

1. **Focus on communication** - Begin by creating a set of communication guidelines for your group. Determine what is necessary for you to feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings during discussion. Don't forget to write them down and review them as a group before each session.
2. **Suspension of judgment** - Dialogue is most effective when you can silence your own internal narratives and thoughts about what others are saying.
3. **Listen effectively** - Active listening requires that you focus only on what the other person is saying

.....
instead of what you think about what they are saying.

4. **Identification of assumptions** - Unidentified assumptions hurt understanding because they make open communication difficult. Try to identify your own assumptions as well as others in the group.
5. **Inquiry and reflection** - Ask gently probing questions and reflect about your responses before offering a reply.

These techniques are just the beginning of the path to true dialogue. The first step comes with making a genuine attempt to allow each other to explore your feelings about different topics as a way of building trust within your volunteer community. Please visit http://www.pallotticenter.org/Resources/dialogue_techniques.htm to find other valuable resources concerning dialogue and open communication.

Recipe for a Good Time: Hausfreunde (Friend of the House)

From the German Embassy: "We believe this recipe came by its cheerful name because it is so easy to make and keep, perfect for a host or hostess who enjoys the company of unexpected visitors. When Christmas brings you a guest, this is a delicious cookie to be able to offer."

In the spirit of hospitality, make these bar cookies to offer to your community, friends, families, and unexpected visitors!

Ingredients:

4 eggs
1 cup, plus 4 teaspoons baking chocolate, chopped

1 cup, plus 4 teaspoons sugar
1 cup, plus 4 teaspoons chopped almonds
1 cup, plus 4 teaspoons raisins
1 cup, plus 4 teaspoons flour
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
3 tbsp. milk
2-3 cups powdered sugar (use more or less depending on how thick you want the glaze to be)

Directions:

Beat the eggs with the sugar till foamy. Stir in the remaining ingredients one by one, ending with the flour. Spread dough into a large greased baking pan (9x13) with 1" sides (this recipe makes bar cookies). Bake

at 300° F for 20-30 minutes. Whisk milk and powdered sugar together. Ice bars with the powdered sugar glaze. Let cool and cut into quarters. Stored in a cookie tin and refrigerated, these bars keep for quite a while.

From: http://www.germany.info/relaunch/culture/life/dec98_haus.html (some edits made by the Pallotti Center.)



Frohe Weihnachten!

iFeliz Navidad!

Joyeux Noel!

Yá' át' ééh Keshmi sh!

Shared Visions

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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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