

SHARED VISIONS

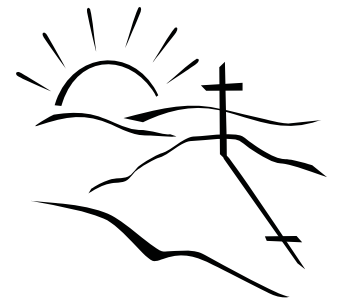
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Volume 18, Number 3

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

Lent: A Time to Reflect On and Prioritize Your Volunteer Experiences

As the seasons of the year continue to shift, so do the seasons of the Church. With Advent and Christmas not far behind us, we now prepare for Lent and Easter. Many volunteers will find that, if the end of their service is coming sometime in the summer, the time between Easter and leaving their volunteer community will fly by.



The Catholic Church uses Lent as a time of preparation for Easter - the rituals and practices of Lent help us prioritize certain aspects of our lives and draw us nearer to Christ. We hope that this issue of Shared Visions helps you to not only appreciate Lent and the Easter season in creative, reflective ways, but to also appreciate how far you have come in your volunteer journey, and to reflect on what may come. We have again included the words from modern spiritual writers, from whom we hope you gain inspiration on your journey.

We welcome your comments about Shared Visions at sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org.

Appreciating Good Friday, Celebrating Easter Sunday

According to the spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, “Only the lost are saved. Only the sinner is justified. Only the dead can rise from the dead.” We experience a spiritual or personal transformation only after experiencing a “little death”—suffering or difficulties, lessons in humility, letting go of attachments. By examining the patterns in life—ups and downs, joys and sorrows—we will see that we live through a series of “little deaths” followed by renewals or “resurrections.” In daily life, we go

through a series of “Good Fridays” and “Easter Sundays.”

For example, as students, we experience the joy of summer only after we live through the difficulty of studying for final exams. As members of a family and a community, we experience the joy of reconciliation only after honest confrontations or conversations. As

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Activity: Which Clothes Suit You: Toga or Towel?

Throughout history, the clothes a person wore were often associated with the individual's status. Today, many youth are tempted to feel better about themselves when wearing brands such as Abercrombie & Fitch or The North Face. It is tied in with personal credibility: wearing the right clothes somehow confers rank and status, at least temporarily.



This so-called norm was also at work in Jesus' time, although He turned it upside down. In those Roman times, slaves wore a towel wrapped around their waist, while free persons wore an outer garment or a toga. Theologian Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, notes that at the Last Supper, the disciples argued about their rank and which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). So Jesus taught them and us a lesson by taking off His outer garment of privilege and wrapping Himself in a servant's towel. By washing the disciples' feet despite Peter's vehement objections (John 13:7), Jesus made clear how He wanted us to live and treat one another, namely, by being servants to one another.

Today's volunteers have given up a lot of the outer trappings of social status and embraced a simple lifestyle. But your clients may or may not perceive you this way. How they see you comes partly from who they are and partly from who you are. They may view you as a true

servant of others or as a person of privilege - or both. They could see you as working to enhance your own status or as enhancing theirs - or both. Here is an activity to help you explore how you feel about your service, and whether you are aware of ways both you and your clients may see you as wearing a toga or a towel.

Directions: Ask each community member to evaluate in what ways he or she may be "dressed" in privilege (perhaps dealing with one's gender, race, age, wealth, etc.) or identify activities (perhaps dealing with sports, local or foreign travel, education, etc.) which you or your clients associate with privilege or with lack of privilege. Here are a few examples to get you started.

Ways You Are Privileged	Ways You Are A Servant	How Your Clients See You
<i>Examples:</i>		
well-educated	using your education to help the local community	they may never have the same educational opportunities as you
being a white male in the U.S.	you are volunteering	as a white male in the U.S., you can be a voice for the voiceless

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Biblical Reflection: The Volunteer's Story and Jesus' Story

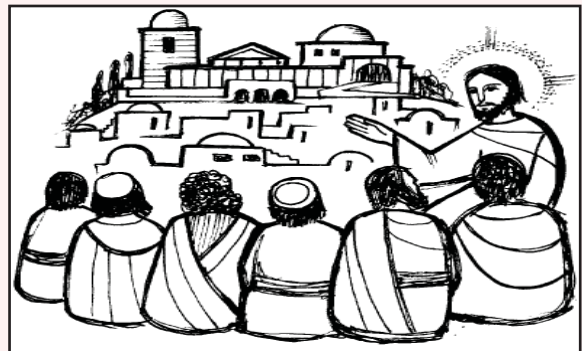
As a volunteer, you already know or soon will learn how important it is for you to be able to "tell your story" about why you volunteered and about what happened while on your way to making a difference in others' lives. Others are interested and need to hear from you. But you, in turn, have to gauge your audience, decide what to emphasize and whether to give them a two minute, five minute or longer version of your volunteer or mission experience.

The writers of the gospel had to make similar choices in deciding how to tell the story of Jesus and what themes to emphasize. This season of Lent is a fine time to read each gospel's portrait of Jesus and for volunteers to think about their own story and how it fits with that of Jesus. Mark's gospel, for example, portrayed Jesus as the Son of Man who was misunderstood by authorities and disciples, and who suffered and died; Matthew saw Him as the promised Messiah and new Moses who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies; and John described Jesus as the Word of God Incarnate and teacher of divine wisdom.

Some think Luke's portrait, which showed Jesus as the compassionate savior and friend of the poor, more closely parallels the story of many volunteers. Luke encouraged us to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Luke's gospel, more

than any other, suggests that being discerning, regularly asking ourselves questions (3: 10-14, 12: 17, 20: 13), is a key to discipleship. Luke saw the new chosen people as the underprivileged, the lame and blind (14: 13-21), the wealthy who shared their resources (6: 17-49), those who allowed women a prominent role (6: 17-49) and who recognized Him in the breaking of the bread (24: 35).

- In your reading of the gospel stories of Jesus, which are closest to your heart? Which themes are among the more important ones for today's world?
- In writing the story of your volunteer service, which themes are among the more important ones to share with others? What biblical stories speak to the themes you have chosen?



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Give each person 10 to 15 minutes to come up with their own list for each category: privileged, a servant, how you come across. Then gather together and invite each person to share what he or she has listed. After everyone has had the opportunity to share their list, then ask: Are there items from the list which need clarification? Allow time for brief explanations, as needed. For group discussion, choose one of the more interesting of the group's contributions. What could a volunteer do to become more aware of unarticulated expectations or of having a sense of being superior or privileged? How has volunteering helped you gain a greater sense of being a servant? One of the greatest benefits of volunteering is learning about how your clients see the world. What have you learned about how they see life? Based on how they react to

you, what is their "take" on what you are doing?

Further Reflection Questions for You or Your Community:

- What are some times when I felt like I was wearing a toga of privilege and how did I feel when doing so?
- What are some times when I felt like I was wearing a towel of service and how did I feel when doing so?
- Is there a biblical story that parallels my personal experience of privilege or service?

If you want to read more about how Jesus saw himself as a servant, as described at the Last Supper, see Fr. Ron Rolheiser's commentary on the Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and on service as central to Jesus' message: <http://ascensioncatholic.net/lectionary/CycleB/reflection/PalmSundayB.html>

Lent's Significance: Yesterday and Today

In the Church's early centuries, Lent was understood as the forty days of preparation for the adults who sought to be baptized at the Easter Vigil Mass. Those already baptized joined in spirit with the candidates, deepened their commitment to Christ and reaffirmed living their baptismal faith as adults. Today we have this same opportunity to deepen our commitment. Be creative in your choice of practices, whether those include prayer, reading, writing poetry, helping others, or some other venture. These Lenten practices will help you as you prepare for Easter to focus your priorities and deepen your spirituality.



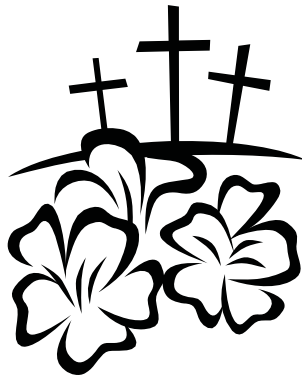
Ideas for Celebrating Holy Week and Easter in Community

1. On Holy Thursday, have a Seder Meal. If you'd like, invite co-workers or volunteers from other communities. For information on preparing and participating in a Seder, visit: www.wf-f.org/Seder.html.
2. Consider attending an Easter Vigil Mass as a community, especially if you have never attended one. As an alternative, have a small prayer service the night before Easter as a community.
3. Create a Paschal Candle for your community to use during meals or prayer throughout the Easter Season. For instructions on how to make a candle, visit: www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/19980301/FRIDGE/PASCHAL.HTM.



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employees, we experience the joy and satisfaction of a job well done, only after hours of hard work and sacrifice. In your time as a volunteer, your "Good Friday" experiences may be manifested in feelings of homesickness, in uncertainty about your future, or in minor tensions at work and at home.



Because you are currently busy with your volunteer placement and your community, you may need to step back a bit to reflect objectively on your life as a volunteer. As Lent approaches, it is a good time to ask yourself how your experiences have changed you thus far. Individually or as a group, consider the following questions.

- Have you lived through any particularly difficult experiences in your workplace, or in your community? Consequently, have you experienced some kind of reconciliation or rebirth? Are there any difficult experiences or confrontations that you have been avoiding?
- What are your expectations of how you will feel after volunteering? Do you expect to experience a sense of joy or renewal as an outcome of your time as a volunteer?

Just as we make sacrifices during Lent in order to grow spiritually, sometimes we need to make a decision to confront underlying tension, sadness, or frustration in our lives. It is likely that you will go through some sort of difficult time as a volunteer. If or when you do, we hope that it will be an opportunity for you to be reborn, to reconcile, and to be joyfully changed by your experiences.

Activity: Letting Go and Living in the Hope of Easter

Many of the spiritual practices of Lent – fasting, doing penance, giving alms, prayer, and others – help us focus our attention on our relationship to God and on the priorities in our lives. The following activity is designed to help you as individuals and as a community of volunteers to consider your priorities and reflect on your hopes for the future.

Directions: Gather as a community, and first reflect individually on the following thoughts.

“...you will see that there is one thing and only one thing that causes unhappiness. The name of that thing is Attachment. What is an attachment? An emotional state of clinging caused by the belief that without some particular thing or some person you cannot be happy... an attachment by its very nature makes you vulnerable to emotional turmoil and is always threatening to shatter your peace.”

- Anthony de Mello, SJ, *The Way to Love*

De Mello goes on to describe the way to drop attachments and the benefits of not being attached to things or people. He says,

“If you just enjoy things, refusing to let yourself be attached to them, that is, refusing to hold the false belief that you will not be happy without them, you are spared all the struggle and emotional strain of protecting them and guarding them for yourself.”

De Mello encourages us to simply enjoy people and things, rather than becoming dependent on them. He also suggests that by limiting ourselves through attachments to a few things, we are prevented “from developing a wider and more varied taste for things and people.”

Ask yourself:

- Since beginning your volunteer service, have there been any attachments (people or things) that you've given up, or that now have diminished importance? If so, what are they? Why do these attachments now have less significance in your life?
- With Easter comes new life in Christ. What are some of the newer priorities in your life?
- What hopes do you have for the remainder of your volunteer service?



If you feel comfortable sharing your insights, do so, and then move on to examining your priorities as a community.

As a community, ask:

- Since beginning your time as a community, have there been attachments that you have collectively given up? If so, what are they? Consider household arrangements, food preferences, and other common concerns. What has your community gained from losing some of these attachments? Are there any losses?
- As you look forward to Easter, are there any new priorities your community wants to set for itself? What efforts will each community member contribute to keeping these priorities?

As St. Augustine wrote, “We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.” Among the many blessings of our lives is the ability to live in the hope of Easter and to reevaluate our priorities and relationships. Use this season to consider how far you've come, what you've learned, and the numerous possibilities that are yet to come in your

Resources for further reading. . .



There are many great spiritual practices for Lent. Consider these texts for your Lenten reading, or as inspiration for prayer or journaling.

Brand, Hilary. Chocolate for Lent: A Creative Approach to Your Lenten Journey. 2003. (inspired by the film *Chocolat*)

De Mello, Anthony, SJ. The Way to Love. 1991.

Holtz, Albert, OSB. Pilgrim Road: A Benedictine Journey Through Lent. 2006.

Ireland Jesuit Communication Centre. Sacred Space for Lent 2008. 2008. Sacred Space is also available online at: www.sacredspace.ie.

Merton, Thomas. No Man is an Island. 1955.

Pope Benedict XVI. Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflections for the Lenten Season. 2006.

Rolheiser, Ronald, OMI. "The Holiest Week of our Church Year: Reflection for Palm Sunday, Cycle B." <http://ascensioncatholic.net/lectionary/CycleB/reflection/PalmSundayB.html>.

Rowland, Susan K. "Day by Day Through Lent: Fasting From Our Clutter." *Catholic Update*, January 2008. Available at: www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0108.asp.

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Shared Visions

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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

Our goal is to promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church, and to support lay volunteers before, during and after their term of service. 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.

The Pallotti Center is located in Washington, DC.

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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