

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 19, Number 3

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

Lent and Easter: Focusing Our Intentions

If the days of your time of volunteer service seem to blend together or speed by much too quickly, it may be comforting to look at the example of the Church. The Liturgical Seasons offer us time to focus our intentions in directed ways. During the Lent and Easter Seasons, take some time to focus on your intentions. Your specific focus is entirely up to you - a decision weighing on your heart, a message from Scripture that stands out, or whatever else is fighting for your attention right now - but you owe it to yourself to allow time for reflection and renewal.



Lent can be a great time to renew yourself by offering up your prayers and sacrifices. If you live in community, consider joining with your community members to recollect your mission and to recommit yourselves to God. The articles *Full Initiation Into Christian Community: RCIA and the Volunteer Experience* and "Scripture Fast" - *An Activity of Spiritual Almsgiving* are designed to help deepen your commitments to and within your community. After Lent, don't let Easter end on April 12th; *Living "Alleluia!"* provides suggestions for living the Resurrection. You'll find other pieces in this issue of *Shared Visions* to help you on your continued journey of living with intention.

The Pallotti Center wishes you and your fellow volunteers many blessings this Lent and Easter! If you have any comments or questions, please be in touch: sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org.

Full Initiation Into Christian Community: RCIA and the Volunteer Experience

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has become a major component of the Catholic journey through Lent and Easter over the past 30 years in the United States. RCIA is now the normative process through which adults enter the Catholic Church after a series of catechetical sessions and public rituals culminating in the reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Great Vigil of Easter. To learn more about RCIA, ask your parish priest or RCIA team or visit the website of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, www.naforum.org.



think about how the RCIA model parallels our own journey towards claiming full membership in our volunteer communities this year.

Inquiry

In the early days of the Church, converts spent up to three years discerning their call to join the Christian community. Today, the best examples of RCIA in parishes and on university campuses continue to recognize that conversion does not always fit so neatly into the confines of the academic year. Initiation begins with tough questions and no easy answers.

The RCIA can teach us a lot about how to be intentional about initiating people into any form of Christian community, so let's

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Coping With Anxiety

At this moment in history, anxiety seems to be everywhere. A major recession in the United States, with reverberations throughout the world, has many people worried about the future. As a volunteer, you may be concerned that you will not be able to secure a job, afford graduate school, or pay off your student loans once your term of service ends. Friends, family members or the people you serve may be worried about losing their jobs or homes. Many have already experienced major losses and are unsure how to rebuild.

Some anxiety is a normal part of human life, especially at times like these. Too much anxiety, however, can be destructive. ***Worry about the future becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when we allow that worry to prevent us from taking action.*** Below are two simple techniques for reducing anxiety which you can practice alone, with fellow volunteers, or with the people you serve:



- Some therapists treat anxiety by helping clients turn their attention from the future and back into the here-and-now. ***When you catch yourself worrying about the future, pause and redirect your attention to what is happening in the present moment.*** If it helps, select a verse of Scripture to recite in these moments, such as Matthew 6:34: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." As you begin to fully experience the present moment, you should feel your worry about the future diminish.



- Taking concrete steps to prepare for the future is also an effective way to reduce anxiety. ***When you find yourself worrying about the future, stop and ask yourself: "What can I do right now to be better prepared?"*** Perhaps you could research scholarships for graduate school, get help editing your resume or read a book on personal finance. Setting and achieving small goals such as these will go a long way toward reducing that out-of-control, anxious feeling. To help prepare yourself for the next steps in your life, use *The "What's Next?" Notebook* found here: www.pallotticenter.org/index.php?m=static&action=whatsNext

During the season of Lent, our lectionary readings guide us along a journey with Christ. As we move toward the climactic moments of Jesus' death and resurrection, we experience many smaller moments of trial and glory. We learn about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and his transfiguration on the mountain top. We witness his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and his betrayal at the hands of his own community. We experience the cruelty of those who torture Jesus, and the love of his disciples. These readings teach us that both trials and moments of glory are integral parts of our own journeys. Our trials prepare us for our glories, and our glories help us endure our trials.

During Lent, take a few moments alone or with your volunteer community to read the lectionary texts and reflect on the trials and glories of your volunteer experience so far. (The daily readings can be found here: www.usccb.org/nab/.) Below are a few suggested readings and questions to get you started:

On the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear Mark's account of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-10). Jesus reveals his glory to Peter, James and John on top of "a high mountain apart, by themselves." Seeing Jesus standing in radiance alongside Moses and Elijah, Peter declares "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Given the hardships which the disciples have already faced in their ministries and the trials to come, it is easy to sympathize with Peter's desire to stay in this place of peace and majesty forever. Jesus, however, gives them

"Scripture

Along with the individual Lenten commitments you have made, it is a good idea to think of something to do together for Lent as a community. Here is one idea to make an offering together that will benefit others in need.

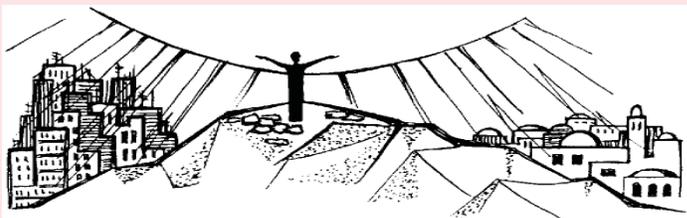
Set aside some time at least once a week during the forty days of Lent in which you will come together specifically to pray for intentions that you come up with as a community. The intentions should be relevant social justice issues or perhaps concerning the group of people that you are currently serving.

Match the issue with a verse from the Bible you can pray with throughout that week of Lent with that particular intention in mind. Here are some examples:

ical Reflection: Trials and Glory

only a brief glimpse of his glory before taking them back down the mountain to continue their work.

For many volunteers, one or more aspects of faith-based service may feel like “the mountain top.” Some love living simply in community with like-minded people; others derive great satisfaction from devoting themselves fully to service; still others enjoy having frequent opportunities to experience the glory of God through prayer and other spiritual exercises. Yet, like the disciples, most volunteers will not stay on this mountain top forever. Reflect on those moments in your volunteer experience so far where you have felt closest to Jesus’ glory. Then, think about how you will take those experiences “down from the mountain” with you when your service is over. How can you use these glimpses of the Transfiguration in your future life and work?



On the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we hear a reading from John in which Jesus confides to his disciples that he is anxious about the days to come (John 12:20-33). Jesus admits, “Now my soul is troubled,” but he does not allow these troubles to sway him from his mission. He continues, “And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

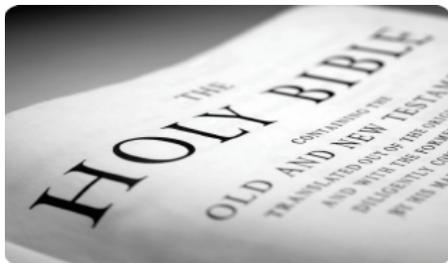
From time to time in both volunteer service and the rest of your life, you may feel called to do something which troubles your soul. Perhaps you need to speak a difficult truth to someone you love. Perhaps you are entrusted with a job that feels impossible. Perhaps you need to make a great sacrifice to continue your mission of service. Reflect on some of the difficult tasks you have faced in the past, and/or any you are facing now. Where do you find the strength to face these trials? How might you help members of your volunteer community and/or the people you serve as they face their own trials?

These are only two examples of trials and glory from our Lenten lectionary readings. As volunteers, you may also find the following readings particularly fruitful for study and discussion:

- From Ash Wednesday, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. In this text, Jesus commands believers to be humble in their prayer and service. How can you practice humility in your service?
- From the Third Sunday of Lent, John 2:13-25. In this text, Jesus casts the money-changers from the Temple. How has your experience of simple living affected the way you view the Church’s relationship with money?
- From Good Friday, John 18:1-19:42. During his account of Jesus’ death on the cross, John mentions the ways in which the beloved disciple, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus care for Jesus’ family and body. What relationships of mutual love and care have you developed during your time as a volunteer?

Fast” - An Activity of Spiritual Almsgiving

Week 1: The Environment/Eco-Justice:
Colossians 1: 16: **“For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him.”**



Read and repeat the appropriate Bible verse for the week together. Then add any specific intentions concerning that issue. For example, **“For an**

increased sensitivity in our country towards waste consumption...for an increased awareness of the effects of global warming...”

This is a great way to make a spiritual almsgiving of prayers for others during a time when you may not be able to give monetary alms or alter your already simple lifestyle. You could even take your prayer a step further and come up with an activity to promote advocacy of an issue that means a lot to you personally or as a community.

Other issues and verses for suggestion (but don’t forget to come up with your own!):

Death Penalty: The woman caught in adultery:

John 8: 3-11

Abortion: “I knit you in your mother’s womb”:

Psalms 139: 13-15

Unequal Distribution of Wealth: Widow with two coins: Luke 21: 1-4

End to War: “Swords into Ploughshares”: Isaiah 2: 4-5

Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching and the Volunteer Experience

As volunteers who often live in intentional community and who work for causes and institutions without the motivation of earning a salary, you are rewarded with different opportunities than many of your peers. Spend some time alone or with your community to consider your counter-cultural experience in light of Catholic Social Teaching. Below you'll find a brief summary of the seven key themes on the left. Review the themes, and use the reflection questions on the right to consider them as a whole.

Seven Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person – *We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person.*

Call to Family, Community, and Participation – *Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.*

Rights and Responsibilities - *We also have a duty to secure and respect these rights [right to life and right to the conditions for living a decent life] not only for ourselves, but for others, and to fulfill our responsibilities to our families, to each other, and to the larger society.*

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable - *A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.*

Dignity of Work - *Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected...*

Solidarity - *We are one human family...Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.*

Caring for God's Creation - *Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come.*

The explanations of each theme are directly quoted from *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Reflection Questions:



- What were your original motivations for seeking to serve as a long-term volunteer?
- If your motivations were related to Catholic Social Teaching, which principles spoke to you, and why?
- In considering the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, which ones do you find directly relate to the work you do as a volunteer? Share examples of your direct experience with these principles.
- What other teachings or ideas influence or frame the work that you do?
- Think about your priorities and values before your term of service. Which, if any, have changed in light of your volunteer experience?
- What aspects of your volunteer experience do you think will have a meaningful impact on your decisions about career, community involvement, relationships, and more?

The Pallotti Center wishes you very blessed Lent and Easter seasons!

For more activities and resources, visit

**<http://www.pallotticenter.org/index.php?m=ca>
and click on Lent/Easter.**

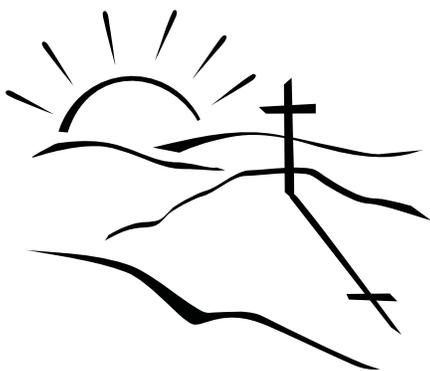
Living "Alleluia!"

During Lent, we make commitments to a certain sacrifice with the intent of uniting ourselves to Christ's Passion. Do we make commitments to help us live His Resurrection? The transformation that happens through the Paschal Mystery- the death and rising of Christ- is also to happen within each one of us. St. Paul says:

"For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection." (Romans 6:5)

St. Paul is describing our union with the risen Christ. How are we to live and believe more fully in His Resurrection while here on earth?

Easter is a time of new life. The Church uses many beautiful symbols to drive this point home during the Easter season: the baptism of water for Her new members, the lilies and flowers that adorn the Church, and even the tradition of the Easter egg, which is meant to signify new life for us in Christ's Resurrection.



Think of ways in which you might more consciously and intentionally remember the new life that Easter brings during the remainder of your volunteer year and beyond. This will be your "Easter promise". Perhaps it is taking some more time personally or communally to give thanks and remember the joys of each day. **Take some time to say 'Alleluia'!** You could even keep a symbol of new life - a flower, an egg, a butterfly, a cross - somewhere visible in your room or home to remind you of your Easter promises.

However you decide to remind yourself of the New Life given to us at Easter, also remember that you are a gift of life to your community and the people you are serving this year. We hope you will continue to seek and share new life even after your year of service.

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Before committing to live for a year or longer in your volunteer community, you went through a similar period of inquiry. Where did you seek out answers to your questions about serving the Church as a lay missionary? Was the process particularly prolonged or did you seem to know what God had in mind for you in a very short period of time? What was the name of the person who was most helpful to you during this inquiry stage? Have you had the chance to continue the conversation with him or her now that several months or even years have passed?

Role Models

Godparents (for the unbaptized) and sponsors accompany the catechumens and candidates through the formal RCIA process. They stand behind them during the various liturgical rites and serve as their role models for Christian living.

Who have been your role models during this year of volunteer

service? Are these people that you knew beforehand or have you met them fairly recently? What qualities have you observed in them that make them well suited for this role? In the time remaining in your volunteer year, what opportunities will you find to be able to offer this same mentoring role to others in your community?

Ritual

Lent is the time for a number of liturgical rituals involving everyone participating in the RCIA process. These prayer rituals give voice to the parish's hope for the continuing conversion of those seeking to be fully initiated into the Church in just a few short weeks.

Are there any rituals unique to your volunteer community? Who is invited to celebrate them? At this point in the year, have you been fully initiated into all community traditions and practices? If not, who or what is holding you back and how will you change that in the months remaining?

Care of Creation - Ideas for Intentional Action



Shortly after Easter Sunday this year comes Earth Day, on April 22, 2009. This time also marks a change in seasons. We

are all called to intentionally participate in the care of creation (see www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp for resources and statements on this). With your volunteer community (and your placement site, if appropriate), use the Easter season to appreciate the world around you and to consider ways you can participate in the

stewardship of our planet. Here are some suggestions:

- Devote some time each week – half an hour, an hour, a weekend morning – to exploring the natural environment around you. If you live in an urban area, explore parks and urban gardens.
- Consider taking up a project to beautify the space in your neighborhood. Look into joining trash pick-up efforts or planting a garden.
- In your community, inventory

your trash. What can you do to reduce what goes into the garbage? Consider making the switch to cloth napkins and towels instead of paper products, buying food items in bulk and storing in reusable containers, and challenging yourself to recycle more than you throw away (check with your local municipality or recycling authority for approved items).

- What other suggestions can you come up with that are unique to your location and situation?

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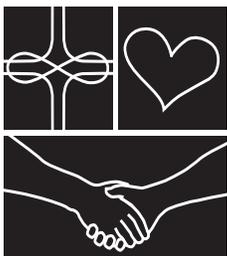
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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

The mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center is to inspire volunteer service through Catholic-based organizations. We support prospective volunteers during their exploration of service opportunities, strengthen the personal and spiritual development of volunteers while they serve, and assist former volunteers to stay connected to their ideals and their communities. The Center takes its 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 have a missionary heart.

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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