

# SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 20, Number 2

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

## Staying Connected Over the Holidays

For many volunteers, the Christmas holiday represents the first real break of the volunteer experience. Other volunteers stay at their placements over the holidays. Both situations present challenges and opportunities with regard to connection. How can those volunteers who go home for the holidays re-connect with family and friends while staying connected to their volunteer experience? How can those volunteers who remain at their placements stay connected to family, friends, and the holiday traditions of home? Here are a few ideas for each situation:

If you are going back to your home of origin:

-Take some time to think about how you want to share your volunteer experience with family and friends. What do you most want to share about your time as a volunteer? How can you help your loved ones feel connected to your experience? Jot down a 1, 5, and 10-minute version of your story, and/or pick out some special photos that you can share.

-Think about incorporating your volunteer experience into your holiday gift-giving. Is there something you can give family and friends that represents your experience so far? For example, could you give family a local craft or food item from the region where you are serving? Could you ask family and friends to consider making holiday donations to support the cause(s) for which you volunteer?

-Consider ways to stay connected to your fellow volunteers over the holidays. See the article in this issue about creating a community CD. Hold a community holiday party before everyone departs for home. Compile every volunteer's home contact info on a list so that community members can keep in touch over the break.



## Happy Thanksgiving and A Blessed Advent to All Volunteers This Holiday Season!

The "to do" list can become long this season. Christmas greetings, parties and end of the year responsibilities among those we serve make this time of year especially hectic. We know we should slow down to connect with one another this Advent season, but are at a loss as to how to do so.

This issue of *Shared Visions* includes activities and reflections you can use, especially in this season of waiting, to connect on relationships with those in your community and with God.

Enjoy the season!



## GOING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS



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# God Has Lifted Up the Lowly

Within days of hearing the angel Gabriel tell her that she is to be the mother of the Lord, Mary does the most human of things. She rushes to see her cousin Elizabeth and share her joy with her relative, who is also expecting a baby. Elizabeth already understands the significance of the child that is growing in Mary's womb. As they visit, Mary is inspired to speak in poetic verse, gifting us with the prayer that has come to be known as the *Magnificat* or the Canticle of Mary.

We invite you to spend some time this Advent meditating over this beautiful hymn of the Blessed Mother that can be found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. It is both a personal song of thanksgiving to God and a hymn that invites us all to stand in justice and solidarity with the poor. Consider the first stanza below:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
For God has looked upon  
his handmaid's lowliness;  
behold, from now on will  
all ages call me blessed.  
The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is God's name.*

Think about how God has blessed you and brought you to this point in your life. What great things has God done for you? From what low points in your life has God lifted you? How do you express your gratitude to God?

Our theme this year in *Shared Visions* is human connection. It is important to recognize how God is blessing us individually, but no less important to see how God is blessing those around us. Mary emphasizes this in the second stanza that follows:

*God has shown might with his arm,  
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.  
God has thrown down  
the rulers from their thrones  
but lifted up the lowly.  
The hungry God has filled with good things;  
the rich God has sent away empty.*

Biblical justice is all about putting people and things in right relationship with God and with others. Mary speaks here of a radical reversal of fortune that God will bring about through the life and ministry of His son Jesus.

In your volunteer work this year, have you seen the power of God at work in lifting up the lowly? In humbling the powerful? How have the connections you made with others helped to bring this Biblical vision of justice to light?



Peace.  
We wait,  
And we work.

We are challenged  
to find peace  
by accepting what is right before us.  
While our days are spent working  
toward a better world.  
Within our vision,  
And beyond our reach.

Here is the wait.  
Here we work for peace.

He is the Prince of Peace.  
We know Him from the manger,  
to the cross, to the halo crowned image.  
Still and unmoving.  
Perhaps a bit of a vision external  
and beyond.  
And rightfully so.  
He is our Root and our Depth.  
He is our Peace.

We search for Him in those we serve  
This unimaginable Prince of Peace  
In the students, the hungry,  
the addicts, the unborn...

And where are we in this? Where am I?  
Waiting and witnessing His birth.  
Wondering what's taking so long.  
Working for Peace... the coming of Peace...  
the presence of Peace.

# Community Christmas Cookies!

As we prepare for Christmas we know one way to connect with one another is through the wonderful aromas of baking in the kitchen. Even if we didn't grow up in a home with a Christmas baking tradition, we can identify the smells of cinnamon and nutmeg with the season.

A great way for your community to connect with one another this season is a Community Cookie Baking Day. Planning such a day can be pretty overwhelming, but we offer some shortcuts. Here is a basic cookie recipe with which everyone can begin. From there, each member of the community might want to make a variation. Anyone can play with it adding his or her own favorite Christmas ingredient.

## BASIC COOKIE RECIPE:

1/2 cup butter or margarine  
3/4 cup light brown sugar -- packed  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
1 large egg  
2 cups all-purpose flour  
1/2 tsp baking powder  
1/4 tsp salt



In a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed, beat butter, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy; beat egg in well. In a small bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt; with mixer at low speed, beat into butter mixture to blend well. Flatten dough to disk shape; refrigerate, wrapped in plastic, 30 minutes.

Work with one-fourth dough of the at a time; keep the remainder refrigerated. Heat oven to 350° F. Roll dough out to 1/8 or 1/4-inch thickness on a lightly floured surface and cut into desired shapes; or, mold in shapes. Place on ungreased cookie sheets, spacing about 1 inch apart; bake 8 to 15 minutes, depending on thickness of dough, until lightly browned. Cool on wire racks. Store in airtight containers.

Makes 2 1/2 to 5 dozen cookies, depending on size.

Now the variations...

### COOKIE CUTTER CUTOUTS... add:

1 tsp. baking powder  
1 tbsp heavy whipping cream

Roll out about 1/8 inch. Use cookie cutters. Bake 8-10 minutes.

### APPLE PIE SQUARES... add:

1/2 tsp. baking powder  
1/2 cup walnuts

*In a separate bowl, mix:*

1/2 cup applesauce  
1/4 tsp. nutmeg  
1/4 tsp. cinnamon

**Pat dough into greased 9-inch pan; press back of teaspoon into dough to make 36 indentations, fill with applesauce mixture. Bake 40-45 minutes. Drizzle with confectioners' icing, cut into squares.**

### SPICED COOKIES... add:

1 tsp cinnamon  
1/4 tsp ground cloves  
1/2 tsp nutmeg  
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Role into balls. Bake 8-12 minutes.

### PINK SUGAR CANES...

**To half the dough, add:**

**2 tbl. raspberry jam  
3 drops red food coloring**

**Roll plain colored and red dough by spoonfuls into 6-inch ropes. Twist together to form candy canes. Brush with beaten egg white. Bake 8 - 10 minutes**

### SESAME GEMS... add:

1/4 cup sesame seeds  
Shape into 1 inch balls. Brush with beaten egg white. Sprinkle with more sesame. Bake 8-10 minutes.

# Connecting Through a Star

The star and the Magi are key players in our traditional images of the nativity scene. But why? What is their role? Where did they come from and why did they want to see Jesus?

There are many ways that we can interpret the role of the Magi historically, figuratively, and theologically. No matter what your interpretation, though, it is understood that the Magi were drawn to Jesus by the star. They were connected to Christ somehow, even if they did not know how or why.

In the 2006 movie, *The Nativity Story*, the Magi are used as comic relief from the stressful, dramatic scenes about a perceived scandalous pregnancy and an angry, jealous king. But they are also shown studying the stars, and in the verse from Matthew on this page, the Gospel writer even declares that they knew this star was HIS star- Christ's star. They calculated and planned, and though they did not know much else, they felt a connection and acted upon it.

Is this not what our relationships with each other and Christ are like? We can only calculate so much, but then we have to go with our gut. We have to take a risk and rely on the connections we feel with one another and with God.

By now in your term of service, you probably have developed some connections with others in your community and with those you serve. But perhaps there are some with whom you haven't connected. Whether we realize it or not, we are all connected in some way through our humanity and through our Creator. The Magi did not know fully why they were being drawn to the star, but they recognized that a connection existed. Look for the things that connect you to your community members and those whom you serve, even if you may have to do some searching.

So it is with our relationship with God- we may not always feel connected to Him. But think about some of the times in your life when you did feel most at peace, most content. Most likely those were also times you felt Christ's presence. In times when He does not feel as near, it is good to recall those times of peace. And as mentioned in the last issue of *Shared Visions*, sometimes He speaks in small, mysterious ways.

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, make a note of all the ways you are connected to our Creator; whether through a star, through those around you, or through your personal time with the Lord. Follow that connection, and see where it leads!



“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage”.

Matthew 2: 2



Looking for more community activities?

You can find ideas for all seasons under “Current Volunteer” then look for

“Community Volunteer Activities” on our website:

[www.pallotticenter.org](http://www.pallotticenter.org).



**CHRISTMAS**  
**AT YOUR SERVICE SITE**

If you are staying:

- Plan a holiday gathering/meal with other volunteers who are staying at your site. Have each person share one or more dishes and/or traditions from home.
- Write a special holiday letter for your family, friends, and/or home community sharing some of your volunteer experience. Include personal reflections, stories, and/or photos- whatever best captures your experience so far.
- If possible, schedule a phone call home during a family gathering so that you can speak to as many people as possible. If you and your family use an internet calling service (such as Skype or Google Voice), you can even set up a video call!



## Activity: Community CD

For volunteers who live in community, the Christmas season may include your first extended time away from your fellow community members. While you may enjoy a brief break from one another, a long separation during a significant season can be difficult. Here is one idea for staying connected to your community over the holidays: making a community CD.

- ◇ **Designate one member of your community to compile the CD.**
  - This person will need to have access to a computer that can play music and burn CDs.
- ◇ **Have every member of your community provide the CD-mixer with copies of their two all-time favorite songs.**
  - Donate the songs anonymously or at the least, only the CD-mixer should know who contributed each song.
- ◇ **Once all the songs are submitted, the CD-mixer should compile them into one CD and distribute a copy to each community member.**

**Over the break, your community CD will serve two purposes. It will:**

- keep you connected to your community members
- provide a fun guessing game over the break!

**When you come back together as a community, have a little party where everyone reveals their song choices.**



**MERRY CHERRY CRESCENTS...** add:  
6 oz candied cherries, chopped  
Shape into 1 1/2 inch crescents. Bake 10-12 minutes. When cool, sprinkle with confectioners' sugar.

**CHOCOLATE SWIRLS...**  
**Add first:**  
**3 oz. package cream cheese**  
**Then:**  
**1 cup melted choc. chips, folded in to the point of a marble effect.**  
**Drop by spoonful. Bake 10-12 minutes.**

**MOCHA ROUNDS...** add:  
2 tsp. instant coffee  
After chilling, roll out to 1/8 inch thickness; cut into 2 inch rounds. Bake 8-10 minutes. When cool, dip each round halfway into melted semisweet chocolate.

**PINEAPPLE AND PECAN DROPS...** add  
**1 cup pecans**  
**1 can crushed pineapple (drained)**  
**If dough becomes too sticky, add more flour.**  
**Drop by teaspoonful. Bake 8-20 minutes.**

**CINNAMON-ALMOND BUTTONS...**  
Shape the dough into one 7-inch log; freeze, wrapped in plastic, 10 minutes.  
*On a plate* mix 2 tbsp. sugar and 2 tsp ground cinnamon; roll log in mixture. Slice log into 1/4 inch rounds; press 2 slivers almond into center of each. Bake 8-10 minutes.

**QUICK CONFECTIONERS' ICING...**  
**In a small bowl stir 2 to 3 tbsp. water into 2 cups confectioners' sugar until blended and smooth; add less water or up to 2 tsp. more, depending on desired consistency. Makes about 1 cup.**

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©2009 The St. Vincent Pallotti Center      Volume 20, Number 2

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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 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 be missionary. The Pallotti Center is located in Washington, D.C.

**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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