

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** —

Human Connection Through Lent

This year we have been focusing our reflections on human connection, but now comes Lent with its interior disciplines that seem to point us in a different direction. Lent is a desert experience, a solitary place where we confront our shadow side and stave off temptation. Is there any room for human connection in our prayer, fasting and almsgiving this Lent, or must we journey through these forty days alone?

Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13) tells us that Jesus in the desert is tempted to rebel against God, but Jesus resists the temptation. Jesus' 40-day display of inner strength can be contrasted with Israel's frequent lapses in faith during its own 40 year journey through the wilderness at the time of the Exodus. Jesus in solitude succeeds where the entire community of Israel fails.

Yet Scripture does not leave Jesus in the desert. On the contrary, it is at this point that he embarks on his public ministry. That ministry will be marked by deep friendships and chance encounters and a constant willingness to have needy people approach him – not all that different from the ministry in which you are engaged right now.

This Lent, we encourage you to make your solitary prayer and reflection a way to get re-energized for your ministry. For ideas on how to get connected with God and yourself, see our articles on praying the Stations of the Cross and taking a personal retreat. Then see our reflections on connecting through the body and the stories of Holy Week for ideas on how to connect with your neighbors, your worksite and the world in deeper ways.

Biblical Reflection: Connecting during Holy Week



As we explore the theme of Human Connection in Lent, we are naturally drawn to the stories surrounding the last days leading up to Christ's Passion and Resurrection. The Passion and Paschal Mystery stories are filled with examples of people's connection with one another and with Christ's own humanity.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday- a scene in which Christ connects with others and they with Him in a positive way. The people pour out into the streets to welcome Him into their city and one can only imagine the joy that was felt by Christ at this sight. It is a time when His humanity meets theirs. People honor Him verbally with cheers of 'Hosanna' and perform a gesture of waving palms to express their joy and welcome.

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Station One:
Jesus is condemned to death.

In what ways does my work bring me closer to someone who is condemned?

*Jesus,
By your condemnation you opened yourself to all who are condemned. Help me to be willing to stand for what is right even when it means I may be disliked, disregarded and rejected.*



Station Two:
Jesus takes up His cross.

Do I accept my cross, particularly the cross I carry at my service site, as the cross Christ asks me to carry?

*Jesus,
You took Your cross with no complaint, knowing You carry it for all of us. Help me to bear my cross with dignity and courage.*



Station Three:
Jesus falls the first time.

Does falling short hurt me, does, what does that say about my humility?

*Jesus,
You fell. The weight was great. Give me the courage so that I can carry a great load. Follow You all the more closely.*



Stations of the Cross

Praying the Stations of the Cross is a form of contemplation. The paced prayers bring the mystery of Jesus' suffering and death to our awareness, making our hearts all the more attached to the saving acts of Christ's death and resurrection. The Stations are personal, a connection between Jesus the Savior of the World, which might seem abstract, and Jesus your Savior, the One who loves you and died for you.

Traditionally, the "Way of the Cross" is a means of making a pilgrimage to the site of Jesus' passion for those who could not visit Jerusalem. Visual depictions of the Stations of the Cross line the walls of nearly all Catholic churches in the world.

You can pray these Stations of the Cross with your community, or take your time to pray them alone.

Connecting During Holy Week cont...

How do we greet one another in community? What are the gestures and verbal cues that we give one another? At this time of Lent and Easter, can we become more aware of the way we greet one another?

We find in Chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel that Jesus speaks to the apostles at the Last Supper and then to the Father in a prayer. His words to the apostles are his way of warning them about what is about to happen to Him, and His prayer to the Father is almost an assurance for Himself that His apostles will be taken care of. His interactions and prayer show His human concern for his friends that He will soon leave behind.

How does our communication with God affect others? How do we deal with mysteries that we cannot explain to others?

And of course, the Paschal Mystery and events of the Triduum itself- the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the Way of the Cross, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection - are FULL of examples of the apostles' humanness and Christ's reaching out to humanity.

Jesus knows the fate that awaits Him, yet He takes the time to celebrate the Passover with His apostles during the Last Supper. He also leaves them NEW rituals in the washing of the feet and the institution of the Eucharist.

What are the rituals that are important to us? How do they affect our connection with one another? How do the rituals of Lent and Easter affect us and our connection with Christ and His Church?

What are some of the other moments of human connection in Holy Week that you can reflect on this Lent and Easter?

May God bless you in your celebration and reflection.



Station Eight:
Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

As a lay volunteer missionary, in the midst of my heaviest burdens, do I respond to others with compassion as Jesus responded to the women of Jerusalem?

*Jesus,
Give me patience and compassion to meet others' suffering in the midst of my own hardships.*



Station Nine:
Jesus falls a third time.

How does it help me in my ministry to remember that Jesus fell three times?

*Jesus,
I can only imagine how discouraged You must have felt at this point. Yet You kept going, facing Your death and knowing that on the other end... is life. Help me to face what can feel like endless burdens in my ministry. Help me to know the value of the cross.*



Station Ten:
Jesus is stripped of His garments.

Am I sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized in our world?

*Jesus,
I hope in the midst of that suffering You would have known the dignity I do not deserve. Your death gave me life and gave it to all people. Help me recognize the dignity of each person when it seems stripped away.*

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Station Four:
Jesus meets His Sorrowful Mother.

Do I have Mary's courage that can set
my loved ones free?

*Jesus,
You must have longed to relieve Your
Mother's pain. Yet You continued to
carry the cross for each of us. I thank
Mary for giving You up for our salva-
tion.*



Station Five:
The cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene.

By choosing to be in volunteer mis-
sions I step forward like Simon of
Cyrene. In what ways have I been
helping another carry the cross?

*Jesus,
Thank you for the opportunities to
help others carry their crosses. Give
me strength to continue carrying the
crosses of those I serve.*

Connecting Through Our Bodies

The story of Jesus' Passion offers many reminders that our faith is an incarnate faith. Throughout Holy Week and Easter, the Scriptures continually bring our attention to the body: Jesus celebrates a last meal with the disciples, He experiences bodily suffering on the cross, His physical body is raised from the dead, and His companions experience His resurrection through the breaking of bread. As Daniel Wolpert writes in *Creating a Life with God* (Upper Room Books, 2003) "God did not make us disembodied spirits. We do not float around in the ether communing with one another through telepathic thoughts. We are formed and made in material bodies that come from the dust of the earth."

Unfortunately, we do not always treat our own and others' bodies as the sacred vessels God intended them to be. In our fast-paced world, we often lose touch with our own bodies, failing to notice them until we suffer a major illness or injury. Cultural obsessions with youth, beauty, and thinness can lead us to dislike and try to change our bodies. Experiences of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or other traumas can leave us feeling ashamed of and disconnected from our bodies.

During this Lenten season, we encourage you to take some time to reconnect with your own sacred body, and find positive bodily ways to connect with others. The following suggestions can be practiced alone, or with your volunteer community...

Examine your diet.

Do the foods you choose to eat treat your body with the care and reverence it deserves? Visit <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for free, interactive tools to help you evaluate your current diet and make changes. Make one or two small, sustainable changes (like eating more vegetables or drinking more water) and pay attention to how your body responds. As a bonus, the foods that are healthiest for us (whole grains, fresh and seasonal produce, etc.) are generally healthy for our environment as well.

Experiment with fasting.

Alone or in your volunteer community, make a commitment to fast for one day per week during the Lenten season. Offer up your fast days as a prayer of solidarity with all who experience hunger in the world. If possible, take a special collection or volunteer for an organization dealing with hunger on your fast days.

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Station Eleven:
Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

You did this for me. Do I remind my-
self enough that You did this for me?

*Jesus,
You saved humanity. When working
with those in need it can be clear human-
kind needs Your salvation. But, Jesus,
remind me that You also died for me.*



Station Twelve:
Jesus died on the Cross.

Can I relate to feeling all hope is lost?

*Jesus,
Help me to live in those moments of
helplessness. Sometimes there is nothing
to do except stay present to my own suf-
fering and the suffering of others.*



Station Six:
A woman wipes the face of Jesus.

How often do I feel as if the work I do has little impact amid the immensity of the situations of those I serve?

*Jesus,
Give me strength to see the work I do as a service to you. Keep me faithful to the small tasks that point to hope in You.*



Station Seven:
Jesus falls a second time.

Have I taken advantage of my times of failure as moments to align myself with the weak and vulnerable?

*Jesus,
Keep my pride in check. Give me confidence to be imperfect. Take my weaknesses and make them opportunities to glorify You.*

Add more physical activity to your life.

If you do not exercise regularly, try adding a brief walk or bike ride to your daily routine. If you are already active, increase your current activity level or try something new. Pay attention to how your body feels before, during, and after exercise. Celebrate and give thanks as your strength and endurance improve. Offer up your exercise (and any aches and pains that result) as a prayer for those who are sick or physically disabled, or for any concern close to your heart.

Breathe.

During Lent, begin and end each day with 5-10 minutes of slow, deep breathing. Clear your mind and ask God to help you experience His spirit through your breath. Pay attention to how your breath feels as it enters and leaves your body. At the conclusion of your designated time, give thanks to God for all the blessings you experience through your body.

Reach out.

Look for opportunities to connect physically with other people in positive, life-affirming ways. Hold hands while you say grace. Try to reach out to more people during the Sign of Peace at Mass. Offer a supportive hug to a friend who seems down. Loving, respectful touch is one of the best ways to care for and connect with our loved ones and neighbors.



What does it mean to fast and abstain?

To **fast** means to do without food. During Lent, Catholics fast together on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those two days a Catholic is only to eat one full meal a day. The other two meals are to be small. Together the two small meals should not equal one full meal.

To **abstain** means not to eat meat. Catholics abstain on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent.



Station Thirteen:
Jesus is placed in the arms of His Mother.

What moments of God touching my heart carry me through my most difficult times?

*Jesus,
I have had times in which the voice of God seems close to my ear. And other times Your voice seems far. Give me faith like Mary's to remain close to You even in the darkest moments.*



Station Fourteen:
Jesus is laid in the tomb.

We wait. I wait. Do I value the moments in which it seems nothing happens?

*Jesus,
I know what will come next. I know through Your suffering You have redeemed the world. But in this time... Give me patience. Keep me committed. Give me courage to face another day.*

Connecting Within: A Personal Retreat

Lent is an ideal time to take a personal retreat. As a volunteer, taking time to step back away from everyday life in order to reconnect with God will enhance your ministry. A retreat gives the refreshment necessary to celebrate the joy of Resurrection. The outline presented here assumes you will make the retreat by yourself. If you have a community or group with whom you can make the retreat, you can easily adapt it to a group retreat. If you have a spiritual director or simply a person you seek out for wisdom, take an hour or two to visit during your retreat.

Carve out a day in which you can get away from the demands of everyday. Pack a lunch. Find a place to be that is outside your normal routine. Your local parish may have a place to offer you. You may find a place in nature. Even a cemetery can be a place to quiet yourself and rest. Ideally your retreat should be in a place with plenty of natural light. Be sure you have a comfortable place to sit.

Here is a basic outline of a retreat:

If you are able, begin your retreat by attending Mass.

Opening (at least 15 minutes):

Begin with a prayer that brings all your concerns of daily life before God. Surrender the anxieties to the Lord. It may help if you write them down then tuck the paper you write into the back of your Bible. Ask God to guide your retreat today.

Activity (at least 10 minutes):

Pull yourself to the present. Slowly look around you and take in the way the light and shadows fall. Notice the colors in different shades. Use your senses. What do you hear and smell? Now find one item in your immediate space that draws you. If you can, pick it up. Focus on it, on contours and edges, on color and wear. Make yourself present to this simple item.

Scripture and Reflection (at least 50 minutes)

Read Galatians 5:22-25.

"The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

There are nine fruits of the Holy Spirit listed here. Tear off nine squares of paper, write one virtue on each sheet, fold them and drop them in the hat or bowl. Draw one virtue. Read the paper. Sit with the Fruit of the Spirit given to you... let the word rest on your heart... relax with it. Once you have had a short while with the virtue, take your journal and slowly answer these questions...

- *Is your first response to the virtue positive or negative?*
- *What is the earliest memory that you associate with this virtue?*
- *Write about a moment in your ministry in which you have used this virtue.*
- *Who have you interacted with who seems to exemplify this virtue?*
- *How does that person do so?*

Envision yourself strengthening this virtue. You don't need to plan it right now. Just envision the person, volunteer, missionary you could become...

Don't rush through this reflection time. It might take more than 50 minutes. If you have a hard time, try using a Scripture passage to guide you.

Take a Break (at least 20 minutes)

Play with the toy you brought. Do it slowly. Stay aware. Connect with this present moment.

Activity (at least 30 minutes)

Look back over the volunteer service you've done this past year. Examine where you've invested time, commitment, emotion, talent and passion. List at least ten things of which you are proud. Once you have your solid list, say a prayer of gratitude for what you have accomplished.

Scripture and Reflection (at least 50 minutes)

Draw another virtue from the hat or bowl and follow the same reflection you used for the last virtue.

Bring with you:

Stationery and scrap paper
Bible
Pen or Pencil
Hat or Bowl
A Permanent Marker
A Journal
This edition of *Shared Visions*
A small toy/game (a Slinky, puzzle, pick-up sticks, Legos or jacks)*

* Don't have a toy?
Make bubbles by mixing
1 part liquid dish soap with 3 parts
water. You can use a wire, a torn
plastic bag, even your fingers
to be the wand.

Scriptural References on the Fruit of the Spirit

Love: 1 Cor. 13
Joy: Phil. 1:18-26
Peace: John 14:27
Patience: Psalm 40
Kindness: Phil. 2:1-11
Goodness: Col. 3:12-17
Faithfulness: Titus 1:1-3
Gentleness: Proverbs 16
Self-control: Proverbs 3

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Connecting Within: A Personal Retreat continued...

Activity (at least 30 minutes)

Think of someone not involved with your service, a person who has meant a lot to you but whom you haven't seen in a while. It could be a person you see as bearing a virtue on which you have reflected. Write that person a letter. Tell them about your volunteer experience. Go into detail; share yourself in a way you might not share with those you see on a daily basis. If you are inclined, write to more than one person.

Stations of the Cross (at least 30 minutes)

Pray the Stations of the Cross found in this edition of *Shared Visions*.

Take a Break (at least 10 minutes)

Go for a walk. Relax and enjoy the moment. Take note of your surroundings. While walking, gather three rocks to be used for the closing activity.

Scripture and Reflection (at least 50 minutes)

Draw a third virtue from the hat and follow the same reflection you've used for the other two.

Closing (at least 15 minutes)

Sit quietly in the presence of God. Reflect back over different aspects of your retreat. As you think through each virtue, write it on one of the rocks you found on your walk. Take your rocks with you as reminders of your reflection on those virtues. As a final prayer, ask God to make you aware of who (or what) most needs your intentional presence in your life and work these days. Stay quiet and open to what you receive. Finish when you feel you are ready.

Shared Visions

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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 St. 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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