

SHARED VISIONS

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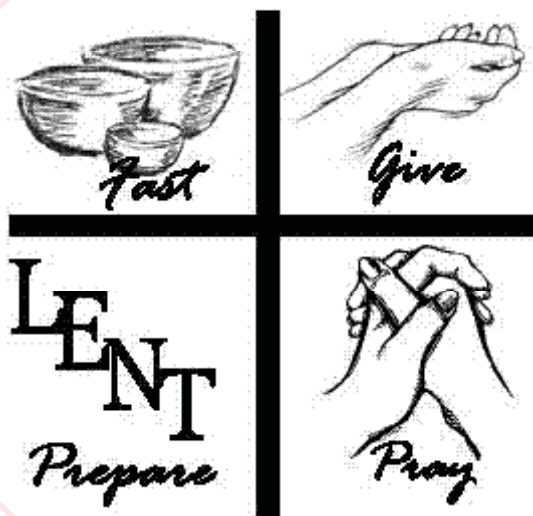
Volume 21, Number 3

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

Living Ministry in Lent

At this time of year, many volunteers are settled into their placements. In the beginning of your mission experience, you probably spent most of your time and energy learning and adjusting: learning about your program and the people it serves, adjusting to living in a new place, learning about fellow volunteers and other co-workers. Over time, the pace of that learning tends to slow. While there are always new things to discover and experience as a volunteer, you can also expect to develop some comfort with your work and your community. At this point, you may feel that you have mastered “the basics” of being a lay missionary and you might be looking for some new challenges. Also, as hard as it can be to believe, you may already be looking toward your post-volunteer life: what are you going to do next?

These questions are well-suited to the seasons of Lent and Easter. During Lent, all Christians are called to reflect on our lives and prepare for the miracle of the Resurrection. In this issue of *Shared Visions*, we offer tools to help you reflect on your volunteer journey and prepare for the re-births in your futures. In two Biblical reflections, we invite you to consider the intersections of your time of ministry with Jesus’ brief public ministry, and to reflect on your service in light of the teachings of Ash Wednesday. In an article on twenty-somethings in the church, we ask you to consider how ministry to young adults might be re-born. Our piece on decision-making offers advice on how to face important choices about both your volunteer and post-volunteer lives. Finally, we offer a list of resources for further Lenten reflection.



All of us at the Pallotti Center wish you a blessed Lent and a joyous Easter!

When It's Time to Make Decisions



Continuing to develop as a volunteer and planning your post-volunteer life both involve decisions. As you become more adept at your work, you have more opportunities to make independent decisions about that work. When it comes to your post-volunteer life, you are called to make decisions from a variety of options so wide that it may feel overwhelming. Fortunately, there is help available. In the Church, we are blessed with a rich history of writing and reflection on the subject of discernment (see the "Resource Center" at www.pallotticenter.org for more on this topic!). In the secular world, we are seeing a growing body of research and writing from a variety of fields on the topic of decision-making (the bestselling book *How We Decide* by Jonah Lehrer is just one example).

One interesting idea from this emerging body of knowledge is the idea of "consequence-based decision making" vs. "identity-based decision making." In consequence-based decision making, an individual focuses on the here-and-now and uses a rational, cost/benefit approach to making a decision. For example, a supermarket shopper may look at a vast array of breakfast foods and make a decision based on cost, convenience, personal taste, and health-consciousness. The challenge of this kind of decision making is that we often have so many options and so many factors to consider that we become overwhelmed- should the shopper buy the cheapest food available? The tastiest? The healthiest? Should the shopper apply the

same priorities to every food decision? Identity-based decision making, on the other hand, calls on individuals to consider who they are and make decisions based on their personal priorities and values. So, facing the breakfast decision, the shopper might ask "Who am I, and what choice would a person like me make?" If the shopper is a health-conscious person committed to organic and sustainable food production, then he or she will only make food choices in line with that identity. Applying this type of decision-making can make it easier to prioritize and to feel satisfied that we live up to our own values and ideals.

Alone or in community, consider what is most important to your own identity. Are you an environmentalist? An advocate for the poor? A peace activist? A consensus builder? Then, ask yourself how the choices you make during the remainder of your volunteer term and your post-volunteer life might be affected if you base them on your identity. Consider what might happen if you embrace the idea of your volunteer work as ministry and yourself as a minister. What choices would a minister of the Gospel committed to environmentalism make? What about a community-minded minister who loves music? A believer in social justice with a gift for ministering to women and children? Developing a sense of your own identity and using that identity to guide your decision-making is an important step in living a meaningful and joyful life, as a volunteer and beyond.

Are You Lost?

Statistics and Questions for Reflection in Community

Fordham University recently hosted a forum entitled “Twenty-Somethings and the Church: Lost?” The conference brought together some of the foremost experts on young adults and the Catholic Church today all asking the questions:

- Are young people leaving the Church?
- Where are they going?
- Why are they going?
- What can we do to bring them back?

At the conference, Jim Davidson, professor emeritus of sociology at Purdue University, presented information from the Pew Research Center’s survey. *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next*, published in 2010, states that of Catholics in the US ages 18-29:

- 64% are certain that they believe in God or some type of higher power
- 24% pray once a day or more
- 34% attend religious services once a week or more

This begs the question why do more than half of young Catholics believe in God, but not attend church? What is keeping people away from Mass on Sunday?

There are many different reasons young people might not attend Mass regularly including:

- Issues that are personal, such as Church teachings on sexual ethics.
- Issues related to the Church itself such as the role of women in the Church.
- Issues relating to the lifestyle choices of young adults: too busy or unmotivated to attend Mass.
- Not feeling welcome or struggling to find one’s place in a parish.

Whatever the reason, there needs to be conversation about how to keep young people in the Catholic Church or how to get them back. As a long-term volunteer in a Catholic program, you have a strong voice in this conversation. Having decided to spend a year or more in service to others, you have dedicated yourself in some way to serving the Church. Whatever your age, you have the potential to be a leader in the Church in the future.

In order to start the dialogue, take some time to reflect on the following questions and/or hold a conversation with your community.

- As a current volunteer in a Catholic program, do you feel at home in the Catholic Church?
- What does it mean to you to be Catholic?
- Do you attend Mass regularly?
- Why or why not?
- If you don’t attend Mass, how do you feel connected to the Church?
- If you do go to Mass regularly, what keeps you going? How can you encourage friends to come with you?
- How does community play into this?
- If you could speak to your Bishop about how to keep more young people in the Church, what would you say?

For more information about the topic and about the conference, please visit www.fordham.edu/lost for videos of the presenters, articles recapping the conference, and ways to join in the conversation.

Another resource is the Millennial Catholics blog – www.millennialcatholic.com.

Biblical Reflection: Public Ministry & the Lenten Scriptures

In Lent we encounter so many of our best loved Scripture stories about Jesus' public ministry. Scholars agree that Jesus was not in the public eye for long, not more than two to three years before being sentenced to death. The Scriptures from these Sundays prompt us to consider the attitudes and actions that we should carry into our ministry in a public setting.

Resist Temptation: On the First Sunday of Lent (Matthew 4:1-11), we hear about Jesus' 40 days of trial in the desert, during which time Satan offers him earthly power in exchange for paying homage to the devil. Despite his fatigue and hunger, Jesus steadfastly resists these temptations until the devil in frustration leaves him alone. We may not be confronted with such blatant temptations on a daily basis, but all around us are invitations to sin: to hold grudges, to waste our small living stipend on alcohol, or to slack off from our responsibilities in our communities. We must be vigilant against these everyday temptations.

Be Not Afraid: On the Second Sunday of Lent (Matthew 17:1-9), the Transfiguration, God's voice thunders from the clouds, and the disciples are struck down in fear. Jesus tells them to rise and not be afraid. There is certainly much in the world that causes us to be afraid. We might already be wondering about what we will be doing to earn a living after the current volunteer year is over in just a few short months. Or perhaps we worry about spending the upcoming Easter holiday with a family who may not understand us. To all of those fears that we carry with us, Jesus tells us to confront them courageously.

Defy Taboos: On the Third Sunday of Lent (John 4:5-42), Jesus dares to speak in a public setting with a Samaritan woman. We know from other Scripture stories that Samaritans and Jews did not intermingle in Jesus' day, and it was even more amazing for a man to be talking publicly to a woman who was not his wife. Jesus defies the customs of his day to realize the greater goal of building up the Kingdom of God. We might ask ourselves if we ever find ourselves in situations which might be considered taboo. Perhaps our ministry puts us in position to daily walk by people who are not always welcomed in society. Jesus' example encourages us not to shy away from engaging them in meaningful dialogue.

Confront Blindness: On the Fourth Sunday of Lent (John 9:1-41), on the Sabbath Jesus heals the man born blind. The prevailing attitude at the time was that a handicap like blindness was the result of a sinful act. The Pharisees in the story act in such a prejudiced, ridiculous manner in pursuing their inquiry into Jesus' miracle that by the end of the story the listener comes to realize that the true moral of the story is that, in Jesus' estimation, it is the Pharisees who are truly blind. We continue to live in a society where prejudice is rampant. Jesus' message today challenges us to speak out against ignorance whenever we hear it.

Comfort the Grieving: On the Fifth Sunday of Lent (John 11:1-45), Jesus travels to Judea to comfort Martha and Mary after the death of their brother Lazarus. He does more than this, or course, even raising Lazarus from the dead in a dramatic display of his power. While these powers are beyond us, we all have the ability to comfort those grieving the death of a loved one. Perhaps those we serve are not grieving a death but many people carry sorrow. We can model Jesus by being simply present with those in sorrow.

The Lenten Scriptures bring us from the desert to the mountain; from the well to the pool and on to the tomb. May our reflection upon these stories help us place ourselves there, living out our public ministry with the same dignity that characterized Jesus Christ.



Lenten Resource Corner

USCCB Lenten Prayer Resources

<http://www.usccb.org/lent/pray.shtml>

Creighton University: Online Ministry

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/index.html>

James Martin, SJ on Fasting and Joy

<http://www.loyolapress.com/almsgiving-and-joy.htm>

Our Sunday Visitor

<http://www.osv.com/OSV4MeNav/SeasonsoftheChurch/LentTheRoadtoEaster/tabid/2214/Default.aspx/>

Catholic Relief Services: Operation Rice Bowl

has a place to sign-up to receive weekly Lenten reflections by email

<http://orb.crs.org/>



Community Activity: Examining Attachment

The following activity is designed to help you as individuals and as a community of volunteers consider your priorities and reflect on your hopes for the future. All quotes come from Anthony DeMello's *The Way to Love*.

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."

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 forming co-dependencies with 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?
- * 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?

Finding Purpose in the Dust

“Remember, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return”

As we receive ashes on our forehead on the first day of Lent, we are reminded that at our very base we are simply organic matter. We were created, alongside “cattle, creeping things and wild animals of all kinds (Gen. 1:24 NAB)”, by a Creator whose ways are beyond our comprehension. We enter this season of suffering and of repentance with a reminder of where we are in the spectrum. We are created... base... tied to the earth... **human.**

Knowing our basic human-ness can be a relief to us. Our understanding of the order of the universe may be vast, but it is very finite. And there is One who is infinite. We aren't asked to be more than human. But then, what does it mean to be human?

When we are reminded of our very basic essence as dust, it can be tempting to dismiss the importance of our actions in light of this vast world so beyond us. However, the Christian faith tells us otherwise. Throughout Lent, we retell the story of the God who so loved the world that God's very self took on the human (re: dust) form, lived alongside us in our earthy existence then died for us, we dust-based humans. Eventually, at the end of this Lenten experience, we celebrate Easter and the joy of the Resurrection. We celebrate the truth: We are of dust and return to dust, yet our lives, relationships and their meaning go beyond the dust. Or perhaps, in our awareness of the interdependence of God's creation, we learn that even the dust matters; that there is light in the dust.

We can take our belief in the meaning of the dust even further. Take it to our service sites. For most of us, our daily work is anything but shiny. The tasks we face each day are tiring, monotonous and frustrating. Our work is dusty. The people we serve are usually looking to have basic needs met: housing, food, healthcare and company. This is the dust of life and it is a beautiful gift from God. Yet the miracle of the Resurrection is in here. Ultimately it's the reason we do these things. Sure, we know that tomorrow there will be a new homeless person, someone else to visit in prison or another expectant mother in need of basic services. Our faith is that this dust is what Christ died and rose for. God came here, in the flesh and changed it all. That's why we do it. Christ gives glory to the dust of our daily work.

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Volume 21, Number 3

Authors and Editors: Alicia Brooks, Michael Goggin,
Molly Linehan, Monica Thom
Production Editor: Molly Linehan

Advisors: Rev. Frank Donio, S.A.C., Rev. Bob Kinast,
Bill Lowell, Sr. Anita Joseph Reeves, Very Rev. Peter Sticco, S.A.C.

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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.

Shared Visions' goal is to explore five building blocks of spiritual development: intellectual growth, emotional and physical health, leadership and prayer.



The St. Vincent Pallotti Center
for Apostolic Development
415 Michigan Ave. NE
Washington, DC 20017
(202) 529-3330 (in DC area)
(877) VOL-LINK (outside DC area)
pallotti@pallotticenter.org
www.pallotticenter.org

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