

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume 22, Number 1

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

The Pastoral Circle Model for Decision Making

Hello from the St. Vincent Pallotti Center! Whether this is your first service experience or you are continuing on, we hope that your volunteer year has gotten off to a great start.

No matter where you are in your volunteer experience, we hope that *Shared Visions*, our quarterly publication for current volunteers, will help you in your journey of service, self-discovery, and faith.

In this year's four-part series, we want to help you discover the Pastoral Circle. What is the Pastoral Circle? It is a tool to help you process what you experience as a volunteer through the context of social analysis and theological reflection, and then put that reflection into action.

The Pastoral Circle was created by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, SJ from the Center of Concern in 1980 and has been used by many different faith-based communities around the world.

The Pastoral Circle is made up of four parts: experience, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral action. You may hear or already know of different terms to describe these actions. For clarity's sake, this is how we will be naming these concepts over the course of the year. In their book *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Holland and Henriot describe the four parts of the Circle as:



Experience – where one has an experience of a social issue.

Social Analysis – where one uncovers the root causes and values behind the social issue.

Prayer and Theological Reflection – where one makes judgments about the issue and its causes based on the Biblical and theological tradition as you have appropriated it.

Pastoral Action – where one acts of the judgments made in a manner consistent with one's own moral values.

Each of the four issues of *Shared Visions* will highlight one of the parts of the Pastoral Circle. In this issue, we focus on Experience. We have included an in-depth look at what experience means and how to find it in your daily life. We have included some ideas for how to incorporate your experience and the experience of those around you in your prayer and reflection through *Lectio Divina*, which can be practiced individually or in a group. We also have an activity to help you discover your new city (or discover it in a different way, if your city is not new).

Also included is a piece on how to reflect on your experience – what you need to be aware of and how to see the big picture. Lastly, we have a list of resources on the Pastoral Circle that you may want to check out or that may be in your community's library already.

We hope and pray that this year or more of service is a challenging, affirming and life-giving time. We have many resources available to you during and after this time of service.

Visit our website (www.pallotticenter.org), our blog (pallotticenter.blogspot.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com/pallotticenter), and Twitter (@PallottiCenter). Please feel free to share your thoughts, comments and suggestions on *Shared Visions* with us at sharedvisions@pallotticenter.org.

In this issue... Page 1: The Pastoral Circle Model for Decision Making // Page 2: Experience and the Pastoral Circle // Page 3: Scavenger Hunt // Page 4: Lectio Divina and the Pastoral Circle // Page 5: From Experience to Analysis // Page 6: Resources for Further Reading.

Experience and the Pastoral Circle

The first element of the Pastoral Circle, and the focus of this first issue of *Shared Visions*, is experience.

In *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Center of Concern, 1992), authors Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J. draw a distinction between approaching a social issue academically and approaching it pastorally.

In the academic approach, the issue is studied from a distance. Its elements are studied and dissected in order to achieve understanding.

A pastoral approach, on the other hand, is an involved approach. When taking a pastoral approach, one gets directly involved in the issue (along with

volunteer, you have the opportunity to take a pastoral approach. This begins with experience.

To better understand what experience means in the context of the Pastoral Circle, think about how you acquire your food as a volunteer, either alone or in community.

The intersections of food and poverty have been studied extensively by academics and journalists.

Before becoming a volunteer, you may have read about the S.N.A.P. program (aka: food stamps), nutrition in poor communities, unequal distribution of food resources, or ethical issues in food production.

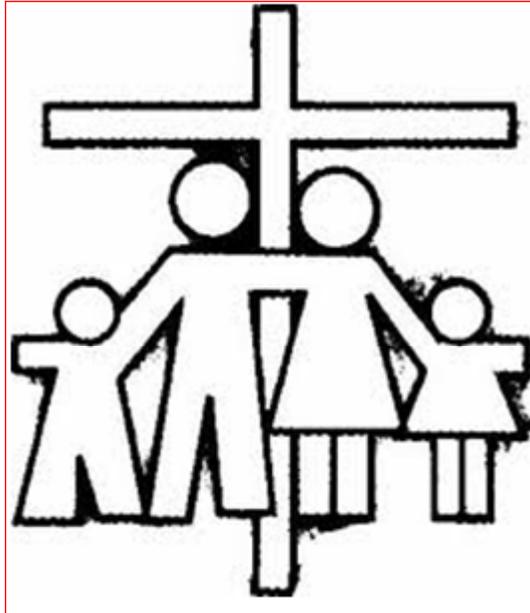
Now, you have an opportunity to experience these issues directly.

The next time you shop for food, take your time and observe everything you can about the experience.

How easy or hard is it to get to the store or market? What is your budget? How does it compare to your budget before you became

a volunteer?

What foods are available where you volunteer? What is unavailable? What can you afford and not afford on your budget? How do you feel about what you can and



community? For an elderly person? For someone on the S.N.A.P. program? How do people get to the store?

How many different stores and markets are accessible to people in your community?

How does this compare to where you lived before volunteering? What is the store or market like for the people who work there?

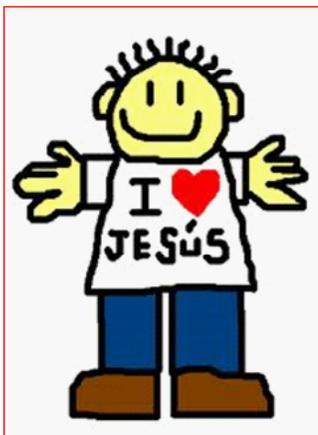
After your grocery trip, take some time alone or in community to write down your observations. If you have the opportunity, discuss and compare experiences among different volunteers or with people you serve at your placement. Try to assemble as many observations, from as many perspectives, as possible. Seek out other, related experiences if possible.

For example, you could visit a different store or market, or a local farm or food processing plant.

Then, revisit these observations over the course of the year as you learn about the other elements of the Pastoral Circle.

What will you learn from these experiences as you apply social analysis and theological reflection to them?

How might they move you toward action or lead you to new experiences?



all of one's beliefs, biases, and history) and tries to understand in order to take action.

As a student, you may have studied poverty in an academic way. Now, as a

Scavenger Hunt

At the pinnacle of the Pastoral Circle is Experience. One great way for you and your community members to have a memorable shared experience is to take part in a scavenger hunt around the region that you call home during your time as a volunteer. Even if you are not currently living in community, this can be a fun way to explore your area.

If you have enough volunteers in your community, you might consider dividing yourselves into two or more teams for this scavenger hunt along the lines of “The Amazing Race.” If you do so, you should remember to keep the competition friendly. It would also be fun to send each team out with a video recorder or digital camera if available. The images of this bonding experience will be great to share at your community Christmas party and all through the year. Solo volunteers will have memories to bring home with you to share with friends and family.

The items for your scavenger hunt suggested below are chosen with the Pastoral Circle in mind. In each issue of the coming year, we will highlight one of the four elements of the circle but in reality it is impossible to disconnect one element from the rest without breaking the circle. In other words, your experiences will always call for your further analysis, which in turn leads to prayer and theological reflection and pastoral action, which brings you to other experiences.

So let’s think of your new hometown in terms of the following categories:

Church

- 5 pts. for an image of the parish you are now attending
- 10 pts. for posing with the pastor of that parish
- 15 pts. for a similar picture with the bishop of the diocese
- 20 pts. for posing with a newly married couple
- 25 pts. for a picture with a baby on the day of his or her baptism
- 30 pts. if you can locate and take a picture outside of your local Catholic Charities offices

State

- 5 pts. for an image of a government building in your town
- 10 pts. for posing with the flag of your new city/state/country
- 15 pts. for a picture outside of a social service agency run by the government
- 20 pts. for cleaning up litter in a neighborhood park
- 25 pts. if you can get the mayor of the town to do the same

Transportation

- 5 pts. for a picture aboard a city bus, trolley or subway train
- 10 pts. if you can get behind the wheel of such a vehicle
- 15 pts. posing in the cockpit of an airplane
- 20 pts. for your team aboard bicycles with appropriate helmets
- 25 pts. next to a hybrid vehicle or one that uses clean natural gas or propane

Parks and Recreation

- 5 pts. for playing a game of ultimate Frisbee in your neighborhood park
- 10 pts. for planting flowers in that park
- 15 pts. for a picture atop a front end loader or other piece of heavy machinery
- 20 pts. for getting 10 or more locals to pose for a picture

Stores and Restaurants

- 5 pts. for a receipt from a chain store
- 10 pts. for a receipt from a store that is not part of a chain
- 15 pts. for a picture taken at a local farmers’ market
- 20 pts. for doing the dishes alongside a restaurant’s kitchen staff

Take three hours to complete your search. For solo volunteers, this is the end of your scavenger hunt. For those living in community, tally up your team’s points and see how your results compared to the other team(s) in the race. The winning team might be awarded a prize that is meaningful to your community such as a night off from community chores, etc. We hope that the scavenger hunt described above will not only be a fun bonding experience for those of you living in community but also an entry point for all long-term volunteers into further reflection on some of the social justice issues that confront your new neighborhood.

Lectio Divina and the Pastoral Circle

The first step in the Pastoral Circle is experience: your own experience and the experiences of others. Our reflections on experience are the most fruitful when we experience something deeply, and/or when we listen to multiple perspectives on the same experience.

Lectio Divina, developed by Saint Benedict, is a prayer practice that helps us experience Scripture in a deeper way than mere reading. In *Creating a Life with God: the Call of Ancient Prayer Practices* (Upper Room Books, 2003), Daniel Wolpert describes lectio divina as a “living conversation,” a way to use Scripture to open up a conversation with God.

Lectio divina can be practiced alone or in a group. Try it by yourself and/or with your volunteer community, and reflect on how praying in this way impacts your experience of familiar Scriptures.

The following instructions are taken from the “Volunteer Community Activities” section of our online Resource Center, found at www.pallotticenter.org.

Visit the Resource Center to find this and many other great activities!

Practicing *Lectio Divina*:

Take a few moments alone or with your volunteer community

to apply the following steps to a Scripture passage of your choosing. You might try the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday liturgy.

As an individual:

1.) Choose a passage of Scripture and read it to yourself twice. Try to look past the literal meaning, instead focusing on whatever



word or phrase most grabs your attention. Take a few moments to reflect on that word or phrase.

2.) Ask God to speak to you through your chosen word or phrase, and listen for God’s reply. Focus on the thoughts, feelings, and images your word or phrase evokes. What is God telling you through this word or phrase?

3.) When you are ready, respond to what God is saying to you through your word or phrase.

Silently or out loud, speak your prayer of “desire, longing, or ac-

tion” to God.

4.) After you respond, settle into a few moments of silence and rest. When you feel that your time of prayer has ended, express gratitude to God for your experience.

As a group:

1.) Choose a passage of Scripture and have a leader read it aloud twice. As the leader reads, group members listen to whatever word or phrase speaks to them. After a brief period of silence, the group leader invites members to speak only those words or phrases aloud (In this and future steps, group members should listen without comment to what others say).

2.) The group leader reads the passage aloud a third time. As the leader reads, group members focus on whatever thoughts, phrases or images the passage evokes for them. After another brief silence, the group leader invites members to share those thoughts, images and phrases.

3.) The group leader reads the passage aloud a final time. As the leader reads, group members listen for how God is speaking to them through the passage. After another brief silence, the group leader invites group members to share what God is saying to them.

4.) At the conclusion of the time of sharing, the group closes with a time of prayer, including an expression of gratitude to God for the experience.

Look for us at the 2011 CVN Conference Nov. 15-18!

From Experience to Analysis

By now you are probably past the introductions and into the heart of living and working in your volunteer placement. Whether you are new to your program, or returning for another year, your work and living situation can benefit from understanding and implementing the Pastoral Circle into the way you make decisions. The fruit of the circle is pastoral action. The heart of it, however, lies in the first movement, from experience to social analysis.

Originally dubbed “insertion” by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J. in their book *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, experience encompasses past experiences as well as what we are experiencing presently as a result of where we are.

“(Experience) locates the geography of our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities,” Henriot and Holland write. “What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they are

responding—these are the experiences that constitute primary data. We gain access to these by inserting our approach close to the experiences of ordinary people.”

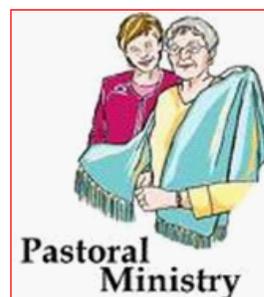
As you begin to understand experience in relation to the rest of the Pastoral Circle, you may want to ask yourself where your present experience is located and whose experiences are you considering when making

decisions. Are you considering your experience without taking into account the experiences, and resulting needs, of others who may come from different socio-economic backgrounds? How can you step back from your own

prejudices in order to reach out to others with love?

From a thorough consideration of experience, one can begin to see bigger picture issues come into focus. For example, if you are working at an urban parish with a soup kitchen and an after-school tutoring program, it may not be very difficult to make the link between poor performing public schools in the inner city and chronic homelessness in the same neighborhood.

Seeing beyond your experience to the big picture issues at play encompasses the move from experience to social analysis. The pastoral approach to social analysis, “looks at the reality (of a situation) from an involved, historically committed stance, discerning the situation for the purpose of action.”

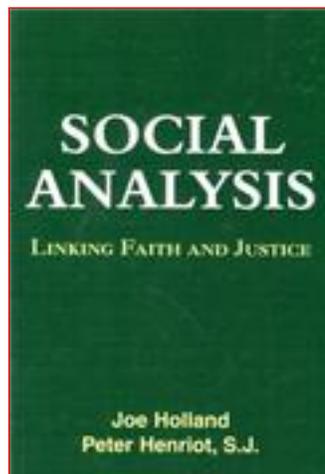


It is also seeing beyond people to structures and systems within which life plays out. The question of what kind of pastoral action

to take gains a fuller dimension when issues are seen as part of a structural whole.

“Increasingly the energies of our civilization are pointed toward destruction,” Holland and Henriot state. “Toward destruction of the poor, toward destruction of those who speak for life and justice, toward destruction of family and community, toward destruction of our precious earth, toward destruction of the human race. At their root, these energies of destruction are extinguishing the image of God in humanity and in all of creation.”

Although this outlook may seem bleak, we are not without Christian hope. This hope is gleaned from a daily experience of prayer and the Scriptures and, in the context of the Pastoral Circle, leads to its next movement, from social analysis to prayer and theological reflection.



The Pallotti Five

Things to make community work...

1. Give others the benefit of the doubt
2. Listen and forgive often
3. Pray together daily
4. Risk opening up to housemates
5. Try not to leave dishes in the sink

NEED MORE RESOURCES?
VISIT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.PALLOTTICENTER.ORG

Resources for further reading. . .



Throughout this issue of *Shared Visions* you'll find references to the works of many spiritual authors regarding the Pastoral Circle and other topics. Here is a list of those works, as well as further resources that may be of interest.

The Pastoral Circle by John Gonzalez
Passionist Office for Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation
<http://www.passionistjpic.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/The-Pastoral-Circle.pdf>

The Pastoral Circle – Explained by Dave Semmens, O.
Carm Center of Concern Education for Justice
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/pastoral-circle-explained>

Salted with Fire: Spirituality for the FaithJustice Journey by Fred Kammer, S.J. 1995, Paulist Press.

Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J. 1983, Orbis Books.

What are They Saying about Theological Reflection? by Robert L. Kinast 2000, Paulist Press.

Shared Visions

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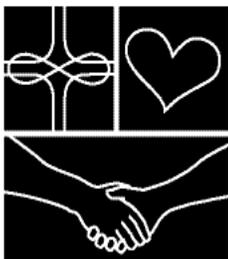
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The Mission of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

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.



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