Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

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For those of you who are new to your role as a lay volunteer, this issue may be of special interest to you. This issue of *Shared Visions* contains the composed expectations of lay volunteers before beginning service in various national and international programs. Also included are the reflections of two former volunteers who examine their expectations and how those expectations related to some of the realities they faced as volunteers.

Oftentimes neglected is our need to articulate what is newly important in our lives as our situations change. Since the next year(s) will be a time of discovery, it is important to extract what you would like to be able to learn from this experience of living in community, working with others, and ministry.

Our worksheet contains an activity which may help you, your community, or your work community come face to face with some of the hard-to-bring-up topics which may surface during your volunteer year. Try to approach the worksheet questions and activity with a spirit of lightheartedness. As a lay volunteer your ministry involves much more than your "job," it involves the sometimes more difficult task of living and working with people of a variety of backgrounds, needs and expectations.

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- Expectations of Current Lay Volunteers
- How do Expectations Change? Features by former lay volunteers, Helen Brennan and James Barry
- Worksheet Activity and Questions for Discussion and Exploration of personal and community expectations

A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance

--Helen Brennan

There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens . . . A time to mourn and a time to dance.
-- Ecclesiastes 3:1,4

As I think back on my time as a lay volunteer at Annunciation House and Casa del Peregrino, I realize that my expectations changed quite a bit over the years. This passage from Ecclesiastes helps shed some light on those changes and on many of the sad, joyful, ugly and beautiful realities that struck me during my time on the US/Mexican border. Although I don't always understand why, I still do believe that there is a time for "every affair under the heavens."

When I first applied to volunteer at the House, I thought I would get my need to do social justice work out of my system. I had no grand plans to change the world, but I did want to do my part. I would work at the House for the summer and that would be it. The brochures described the community living and spirituality of the House, which I thought I could tolerate, but never really understand or appreciate. Luckily, none of this happened.

The summers at Annunciation House were just great. At first I had to

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Learning About Homelessness and Myself

--James Barry

I volunteered because I wanted to learn about homeless people: who they were, what they thought, what they knew after surviving a life so hard. I felt I should listen to what they had to say and do something about their suffering.

It was scary and exciting to leave my family, the comfortable friendships and my possessions and barrel into an unfamiliar situation. As the bus entered Washington, DC, I thought - this is a completely new chapter. This is the first major decision I have made in my life.

The first days were a blur of faces and introductions. The people smiled a lot. This was good because the community quickly became a big part of my life. Like most volunteers, I knew no one else in the area.

My first position consisted of sorting and distributing used clothes. With the boundless enthusiasm of a new volunteer, I rifled through each bag, sized everything and folded the empty bags into perfect squares. Then I stood waiting for something dramatic to happen. I had expected a constant sense of urgency to be attached to all my tasks. What I was doing in reality went

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adjust to the many people, the Spanish, the food, the lack of privacy, and the hectic days. In doing so, I also began to really depend on the volunteers and the shared prayer. With time I found that living in community and developing a spiritual base for my daily work actually fortified my being at the Houses. Adjusting to the Houses came as a surprise and motivated me to go back for a longer stay. I wondered what it would be like to live at the Houses for six or eight months. At first it came easily: I could get along with just about any of the guests or volunteers. I could respond joyfully to the needs despite the frustrations. I could be patient and understanding. I could say good-bye to guests and volunteers and then welcome new ones as they arrived. Although there was sadness at the Houses in the guests' experiences and frustrations, I never felt too down myself.

But then -- I am not quite sure when -- it became a bit more difficult. Community meant constantly welcoming new people and then getting to know them. Working for social justice involved setting limits and saying "no." Responding called for decisions when there was no right or wrong and sometimes it just felt wrong no matter what. In short, living the gospel meant coming to grips with the reality that there is a "time for every affair under the heavens." Slowly, as I met more people, questioned my decisions, celebrated many holidays, cooked lots of beans, and simply lived and listened, I eventually realized that there is a "time to mourn and a time to dance."

At first I thought I could just work and do my part at the Houses. I did not understand that *being* is as vital as *doing*, especially in the community setting. Looking back, more than anything else, I am thankful I had the chance to mourn and dance and simply *be* with my friends and my God.

Helen Brennan, is a former Annunciation House Volunteer (Juarez, Mexico)

We welcome your comments and suggestions!

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS AS A LAY VOLUNTEER?

Kris Butler--
Our Little Brothers and Sisters, Honduras

I was looking for an opportunity to serve others and experience a different reality from the comfortable suburban lifestyle I enjoyed while growing up. In addition to being a response to important needs, I expect this volunteer experience to teach me much about myself, my spirituality, and my role in the global community.

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Mary Frances Gillespie--
Jesuit Int'l Volunteers, Tacna, Peru

I'm filled with excitement and happiness at the thought of spending the next two years with the people of Peru. I feel as though I'm receiving a great gift and a tremendous opportunity.

But sometimes I catch myself dwelling on images of people living in abject poverty and I'm filled with fright and a feeling of inadequacy. I picture myself far away from family and friends, in desperate situations, and I'm filled with doubts.

I don't know what I expect to accomplish but I'm confident I will learn more than I think is possible. My greatest hope is to find affirmation of life in the struggles of those I meet.

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Mary Crossman--
Lay Volunteer Program in the Archdiocese of Boston, Roxbury, MA

As I prepare for this wonderful opportunity, I think about the people with whom I will be working and serving. How do they view the world, God, and the future? What gifts do they share, and how can I help to unleash those gifts that God has bestowed upon them?

I expect to work hard during the upcoming year, both physically and spiritually. Through hard work I hope to see the gifts that God has blessed me with making a difference in the lives of those who may be less fortunate.

I expect to really define more clearly what Church is and to be able to live out that meaning by instilling in people a sense of hope for a better tomorrow.

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Jenny Smith-- Pallottine Apostolic Associates, Milwaukee, WI

I have several expectations upon enter

The Beginning of Wisdom

--A.D.T.

Sharing one's expectations with others is the beginning of wisdom. "There is a time for every season under heaven," the biblical author of Ecclesiastes tells us. In a sense, what we have here in *Shared Visions* are respectively three types of wisdom seen at different stages of ripeness: initial expectations for the **future**, like a planting; an on-going critique of **present** realities - like a nurturing; and reflections on **past** expectations - like plucking the ripe fruit from the vine.

Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes, wanted to share his collected wisdom sayings concerning work, pleasure, friends, the gain and loss of goods, the purpose and value of human life, and the existence of a divine plan which he considered hidden from humanity. Qohaleth gives us an example of how to do theology, to go from experience to theological understanding and judgment.

This biblical author plays with his readers. The book's name, Ecclesiastes, means in Greek: "he who gathers the community," the *ecclesia* - the Church. The author's name, Qoheleth, means in Hebrew, the same thing, he who gathers the Qahal, the community.
Perhaps this biblical writer is encouraging us to follow in his footsteps and share our wisdom as well.

When a volunteer shares his or her expectations, that invites others in, for comment, for formation of a community of like minded people who share their

ing into a year-long volunteer experience. I want the opportunity to live in community with other people who share the same commitment to social justice and living out their faith. I also want the chance to work with directly affected people and to somehow make a difference in their lives.

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Ed Philips--
St. Catherine's Indian School, NM

This experience would be a way to give thanks for the security that God has granted me these past years. I would share my God-given talents with those of another culture in order to help us both bridge the gap and bring us closer together as Jesus taught us.

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Angela Gross--
Notre Dame Volunteer,
St. Catherine's Indian School, NM

I came to teach out of a conviction that God was calling me here for a two-fold purpose: To share the gifts I have with those around me and to learn from and receive the gifts of others. This sharing of gifts will enable me to grow.

Kitty Bacon--
Annunciation House, Juarez, TX

. . . I am unable still to shake off an undefinable yet persistent sense of being an outsider.

When I applied to a few of the lay volunteer opportunities in the [*Connections*] directory, it never really occurred to me that there was anything unusual about a woman of 63 doing so--especially one with such a large family (I have 20 grandchildren!). After I was accepted at Annunciation House, my first choice, many people in my life carried on as though I were doing something brave and unique. This response made me uncomfortable at the time and acutely so after getting here and adjusting to the fact that my dim perceptions of what I had come for had little to do with the reality in which I found myself.

. . . I know I do not want to live exactly the same life I lived before. What the future holds for me for the remainder of this particular life I am trying to leave in the hands of God; whether it be radical or even perceptible only time will tell, and only God and I will know.

vision, their collected wisdom about life and God.

Volunteers, by sharing your vision, you are helping to plant and to build a community of faith which takes time, God's grace, and ongoing nurturing. Sharing expectations is more than simply an individuals sharing imaginings. It's something the community values, critiques and which in turn nurtures the young and old, "for every season."

Andy Thompson is National Director of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center

The 1993 edition of *Connections, a Directory of Lay Volunteer Opportunities,* is in . . . call or write for a free copy (for you *or* a friend).

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more like this: "Do you need those shoes in a size 9 or a size 9½ ?"

I saw the same people everyday. Part of my job consisted of telling people what clothes they could have and what clothes were off limits to them. There were rules, but it was almost always a judgement call. Sometimes they said, "God bless you," and sometimes they said, "You think you're running the show but you don't understand anything."

I did not prepare for the fact that my work could be boring or seemingly insignificant. At times it was, but to a homeless person a pair of shoes that cut his feet is one of countless, nagging problems. If I changed this situation, something positive has happened.

The poverty I saw was slow and grinding. It was not the dramatic images of visibly starving children but of young mothers shelling out food stamps and exhausted men idling outside of liquor stores. The people who lived in this part of Washington lived their whole lives in this poverty. It all seemed so normal. Barely anyone expected change.

During my time as a volunteer no one cared what school I graduated from or how my parents earned their living. All that was important was how I treated the people around me. I had to learn to relate to people in different age groups and to people from other countries.

At times I questioned my reasons for volunteering. I thought, yes, it is necessary work, but maybe it is not for me. I spent one day helping an old woman move her furniture from on apartment to the other. I was humping a crusty toaster oven across a parking lot thinking "I went to school for this?" People in my graduating class are in an office right now faxing something or producing some kind of report. They are learning skills that I am certainly not learning. Am I falling behind?

During the winter my job of distributing clothes and blankets became very important. It was clear. If someone is sleeping outside freezing, I give them a blanket. This was clearly a difference. At times like that there was nothing else I would rather be doing.

I volunteered to learn and to change things. I did learn about some of the realities of homelessness and the experience did change me.

As a volunteer I worked with homeless people and got to know some of them. We spent time together and influenced one another. I also met people from all over the world who left their families, friends and jobs to do something positive and reach out to others. I came in contact with people who were living philosophies of non-violence and civil disobedience.

Volunteering allowed me to see a place I had never seen before. I will always have that with me.

James Barry, is a former SOME Volunteer (Washington, DC)

Group and Self Awareness Activity

Most of you have probably been living/working as a lay volunteer a little over a month and are now just on the brink of stepping from the "honeymoon stage" to reality, both the good and the bad. This activity is designed to help you learn more about members of your community, co-workers, and yourself. Have fun with it, but be sure to be honest. Fortunately, your year is still young and you have plenty of time to grow individually and as a community.

For those of you who do not live in community, or for anyone who would like to get "double mileage" out of this activity, try this activity with your co-workers. Maybe all of the staff members would like to participate, or perhaps this could be used as a means to evaluate yourself with your supervisor. Another option is to play the solitaire version (see Guidelines below).

You will notice the statements are coded: C = community related; W/C = work and community related (read according to your use).

We realize that some issues may arise which are not so "fun." We will leave it up to all of you to call "time out" if the atmosphere gets too intense, and to work things out at a later date, perhaps even with an outside mediator.

This activity is set up to offer you several variations to fit your current and future needs. It's purpose is to open up discussion or to evoke awareness pertaining to how you relate to others on an individual basis or in a group.

Guidelines:

- *Set a time limit for the total exercise (1 hour, 1½ hours, etc.).*
- *Cut out each statement, fold in half and put in a pile or in a hat.*
- *Each player takes a turn choosing one slip of paper. (Player has option to re-choose new statement if so desired.)*
- *One at a time read each statement aloud and answer honestly if you agree or disagree with it.*
- *Give each person a chance to support or question your answer and take time to listen and to discover the opinions of each member of your group.*
- *Upon completion of the exercise, follow up with the discussion questions on the following page.*
- *Solitaire Version: Choose the statements which relate to your current experience. Journal or reflect on your responses.*

(C) **I am usually the one who takes the initiative in planning special events/ weekend trips for the community.**	(C) **It upsets me if someone from my community doesn't show up for a scheduled event.**
(W/C) **I tend to "pitch in" and help even when something is not my designated *work assignment/chore*.**	(C) **I like it when others in my community have friends/family/ boyfriends/girlfriends visit.**
(C) **When there are special beverages or food in the house, such as soda, potato chips, or pizza, I eat/drink as much of it as possible because I don't know when these items will be around again.**	(W/C) **When I have a problem with someone, I go directly to that person to address the issue, as opposed to going to other *co-workers/community members*.**
(C) **I would like to see my community include more people (especially those we are serving) into our group.**	(C) **I think some of the habits I have annoy or upset members of my community.**
(C) **I enjoy *eating meals/praying* (choose one) together.**	(C) **When I get up early in the morning I just want to be left alone.**
(C) **I like to do things with only a few members of my community because it's difficult to come to a consensus on where to go or what to do in a huge group.**	(W/C) **I tend to do my designated *work assignments/chores* on time and without having to be prodded by other *co-workers/community members* to do so.**

more statements on page 6. . .

Worksheet Discussion Questions

Group and Self Awareness Activity

1. What have you gained from this activity?
2. What do you see as your strengths/weaknesses (as an individual or as a community)?
3. Do you think that it would be helpful to do this type of activity again?
4. In what ways do you understand your community members (or yourself) better? Were any misunderstandings cleared up?
5. Do you expect to work together differently with others now that you have completed this activity, or will things pretty much stay the same?

Questions Relating to Articles

1. James Barry talks about the importance of community--is community a big part of your experience as a volunteer? What is "community" like for you?

2. One of Helen Brennan's initial expectations was her volunteer experience would allow her to get the "need to do social justice work out of [her] system." Are there ways you share that expectation?

3. What do you feel is to be gained from your year(s) as a lay volunteer? Do you sometimes wonder, as James Barry did, if you are "falling behind?" Explain.

4. Both authors explore somewhat their day-to-day existence as volunteers. Helen concludes by saying she discovered that "*being* is as vital as *doing*". James writes early on in his article: "I had expected a constant sense of urgency to be attached to all my tasks." How does your experience relate to either of these statements?

5. Choose one of the seven expectations stated by lay volunteers (pages 2 and 3) that you relate to the most. Which expectation did you choose and why?

Optional Group/Individual Prayer

Create your own Prayer of Thanksgiving in light of what you have gained thus far in your experience as a lay volunteer. [Group: Choose someone to open and close the prayer. Allow all who wish time to read aloud their prayer. Individual: Using the opening and closing, fill in with your own thanksgiving(s).]

Opening: God, we thank you for this opportunity to serve and for the many ways you touch our lives as volunteers . . .

Closing: . . . Lord, bless us as we learn about eachother, ourselves and those we serve in your name. **Amen.**

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(W/C) **When I am having personal problems, this does not affect the way I relate with members of my *office/community*.**	(W/C) **I have a real sense of comradery with the people in my *office/community*.**	(W/C) **I keep things that bother me to myself.**
(W/C) **I am usually conscious of others' needs in my *work place/community*, asking them how things are going and listening to their responses with interest.**	(W/C) **I am aware of my own needs as a member of my *office staff/community* and am not afraid to express them.**	(W/C) **I discuss differences with *co-workers/community members* at appropriate times, i.e., not in front of others and not during stressful times.**

The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center: To promote lay volunteer service that challenges the laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church. Our goal is to support lay volunteers before, during and after their term of service. Local Pallotti Centers are located in Boston, Memphis, Saint Louis, and (opening soon) Paterson, NJ. The National Office is in Washington, DC.

The centers take their 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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