



Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers
presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center ...
...The people who bring you **Connections**

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Overview: With all the poverty, suffering and injustices in our world, a volunteer's job is truly never done. As almost any volunteer will tell you, it is impossible to forget about that job once the work day is done. Many find

it difficult to maintain a balance between their work, community, self care and other obligations. In this issue of Shared Visions, **Jason Rinaldi**, with Franciscan Volunteer Ministry, examines his own work with the homeless, his motivation, and the influence of the people he serves on his life and faith. **Joanne Moran** discusses the life and realities of the young children who surrounded her as a Quest Volunteer. Use

In This Issue:

- Volunteers on the job . . . What does your work mean for you?
- Guided Imagery, reflection exercises, discussion questions

these articles, along with discussion questions and reflection exercises inside as a guide to examine your own work and its influence on other aspects of your life.

Gifts of the "Forgotten"

Jason Rinaldi
Franciscan Volunteer Ministry

He wears a wise old face. His navy blue overcoat hangs long and thick from his tired, old body. The orange sun of winter outlines a humble chin, ragged with white whiskers. He always offers a smile to me as I greet him at the door of the soup kitchen. He is always happy and thankful to God for the small meal we offer him.

He always has a smile, even though he has no heat in his house nor food in his cabinet. He offers me a magical tale from his younger days or a wise proverb, a result of 70 plus years of life experience. When he finishes eating the warm bowl of soup, his only meal for the day, he slips into the frigid black void of the inner city night, only to emerge the next day for another morsel.

My work at the St. Francis Inn consists of working side by side with those people who are the forgotten, the so-called "outcast" of our society, the elderly, the single Moms with four growing children, the single men and women who experience a painfully real side of America, all too familiar for millions of people today. With the help of us lay volunteers, the Franciscan Friars and Sisters operate a soup kitchen, a night shelter for men, a women's crisis center and a thrift store in the area of Philadelphia called the "Bad Lands." Each day we feed between 200 and 500 people; we minister to women who are abused and battered on the

streets; we comfort and shelter homeless men, and clothe several hundred needy people daily. However, the real duty of the people of St. Francis Inn is to live the Gospel, and by doing so in our personal lives, restore hope and dignity to those who have lost it somewhere along the path of their life's pilgrimage. Ultimately this duty makes us witnesses

of the Gospel, so all who look upon us may be inspired to take this same duty upon their own shoulders.

Many sections from scripture stand out in my mind as I think of this task we are trying to perform; but one in particular convinced me to become a part

"Gifts of the Forgotten" . . . continued page 2 .

God Through the Eyes of a Child

Joanne Moran
Former Quest volunteer

I joined the staff of St. Gabriel School in August 1993 as a Quest volunteer. My position involved many tasks throughout the day, but basically I assisted in the kindergarten and second grade classrooms and helped supervise recess and aftercare. Hence I came in contact with almost every student by the end of the day.

The St. Gabriel School children and I differ in many ways. My family can be described as upper-middle class, white and suburban. On the other hand, these children are minorities, lower-middle class and urban. They experience a dysfunctional society, suffer financial problems, witness violent crimes and yet somehow maintain a degree of childlike innocence.

St. Gabriel's includes religion in its curriculum. The emphasis is on Christianity, Catholicism in particular. The school teaches and stresses strong moral values and ethics of right and wrong. This is a high priority considering many parents do not support or encourage such beliefs at home. The children's lack of respect for one another and other things can be seen in their daily behavior. Many solve problems through violence, and not through more peaceful means. They lack the necessary techniques. Their initial reaction in handling conflict is to use their fist. Some children experience constant chaos at home. They are shuffled back and forth

God through the Eyes . . ." continued page 3

of the work done at St. Francis Inn. Jesus is describing the final judgement of humanity and he has before him all the people of every nation and of every age. He says, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25: 31-46).

Living out this Gospel is not easy. Before I arrived at St. Francis Inn, I lived under the impression that living the Gospel was one dimensional, plain and easy. Once you decided to live it, there was not much else left. I soon learned that I was grossly mistaken. Coming from a white male, middle class college environment, there were little if any trials in my life to face, to "shake" and test the strength of my faith. When I arrived in Kensington, I found myself surrounded by people who were entirely different from myself, people who were never in college, people who were never members of the middle class and never shared in its values. I was surrounded by people who most often were physically dirty, who had AIDS and who did not share my interests such as religion, types of music, and my sense of humor. I was confronted with constant temptation to simply do my job and avoid the true work that needs to be done here.

One day I came across a woman, one of our regular guests who I will call Alice. Alice is one of those people who has tested me the most. She often smells of body odor; she is missing teeth and does not bathe often. She is an I.V. drug abuser and has wounds on her arms and legs almost all the time. Her face is covered by frequent bruises and scratches. The most shocking detail is that Alice is in the final stages of AIDS, so there is a good chance she will not be alive this time next year. She was born to an abusive household that she left at an early age. She became involved with life on the streets after she could not make it on her own. Her family disowned her; her three children disowned her. Now only those people that profit from her welcome her company. Even they disown her with the beatings they give her each night.

"For God's sake, don't touch her!"

On this day Alice appeared very lonely and discouraged. Her face hung at her chest as she fed herself the bowl of soup, her only meal. She saw me across the soup kitchen floor and mustered every shred of energy she had to call out to me. I was astounded. I never saw such a pathetic face in all my life. I could see every spike of pain, every sin she had been victim to - all on her face. It made me stand back and hesitate.

Every fiber in my being told me to hide, to run and, for God's sake, "Don't touch her!" I was tempted to abandon the Gospel at this minute and blow her off, find a diversion so I could avoid her, even be rude and push her away. She ran up to me without a word, threw her arms around me and kissed me on the cheek. It felt to me like the kiss of a mother, slight and gentle. Without a word, she let me go and looked into my eyes with a smile in her heart. This is why I had come to Philadelphia. This is the true work that needed to be done at St. Francis Inn. Above all, this was the healing power of Christ in my life and

apparently in hers as well. The ability to grow from charity is a grace from God which is a great source of fulfillment and personal reward in my life. This is the "steam in my engine," especially on those not so good days.

On certain days I do not feel the passion; I do not feel the drive. Some days I become tired of work, of stretching and being sensitive to other's needs. On other days I feel as though my needs are being forgotten by my community. When this happens, I try to take appropriate distance and time for myself. Often I retreat in prayer and contemplation. I step back and look on my current life situation. I determine my priorities and what I need to do now in my life to continue the journey and be true to the call, to God and to myself. When I become reoriented and refreshed, I return to my daily routine so that I can continue the "good fight."

I like to think of this year in ministry as an internship in spirituality. Through serving the poor at St. Francis Inn, I am learning each day what the Gospel means. Jesus' message, "Love one another as I have loved you," becomes more clear each day. +

Take a 1/2 hour with your community and open yourselves to a background, light a candle. To prepare yourself to enter into this prayer to keep your back straight. If you are lying down, do not use a pillow.

Leader asks the group to: Begin by closing your eyes and breathing enough to become relaxed and centered within yourself. Slowly read t

Leader: After spending a few minutes relaxing and asking for God's spirit to Ask the group to: *Consider the people in our country who are born into poverty through indifference leaves them alone in prisons and shelters. Consider the unethical capitalism, by discrimination and prejudice.* Pause for one minute

Now picture yourself in the presence of a loving God, who has compassion on your mind. Picture and give a name to a man or woman or child who represents so that industrial countries can turn the forests into grazing ground for cattle. Contrás because he organized villagers to build a well; Rosa, a grandmother; Chu, 17, who is dying of cancer from pesticides after picking grapes in the mountains; Juan, an 8-year old Mexican who helps his family survive by salvaging from health benefits for herself or her children. What can you do? Who can you help?

As the music continues, slowly return to the group and open your eyes when

between parents, grandparents and other adults. I will never forget the time a fourth grade student told me to, "marry only for true love." She was too familiar with uncertainty at home, as she experienced several father figures in her short life. This is a common scenario for so many children at St. Gabriel's.

Prayer is also incorporated into the school day. Each morning begins with the whole school reciting prayer together as community. The children's testament of faith and belief in God was a powerful enriching experience for me. At times I saw God through the eyes of a child, not as an educated adult with questions or disbelief. The children truly believe in the power of prayer. I was often in the kindergarten room at the end of the day when we recited our closing prayers. They slowly added individual prayers - for their grandmother who was sick or for another friend. The intentions were simple and yet full of honesty and truth. By the end of the year, prayer was a constant, holy time.

My community also enhanced my spirituality. Quest volunteers live in Christian community with a group of Catholic sisters, the Religious of Jesus and Mary, and other lay individuals who choose this lifestyle. Through prayer and discussions, we formed strong bonds of friendship and understanding.

For me, community is an excellent source of support in ministry, personal growth, and renewal. However it takes a

lot of time and energy to create and maintain a balance that exists between work and community. Many times I struggled with the dilemma of community or work. I came to realize that there is no easy answer. To aid the decision making process I developed a few guidelines for myself: Who needed me more at that particular moment? What consequences would result? What did I want to do? What would be more satisfying to me? Which commitment did I make first? Sometimes these questions were helpful; other times I just became more confused.

One time my community decided to repaint our kitchen. The selected weekend coincided with St. Gabriel's Eighth Grade Graduation and Confirmation. I wanted to be a part of both; but was I being realistic? I finally chose to attend the school events as they were very special days to the Eighth graders. I wanted to show my support to the students. As it turned out, the kitchen project continued into the next week, so I had time to make up for my absence. Other situations were not so easy to decide or to resolve.

My volunteer year at St. Gabriel School and in community was an opportunity to learn and grow spiritually, as a whole person, as a community member and in society. I have a deeper relationship with and understanding of God. I have an increased awareness of social consciousness and the world around me. I will never regret the day I chose to join QUEST. +

"I came to realize that there is no easy answer."

Guided Imagery

ferent kind of prayer . . . Find a quiet room, designate a leader, play soft instrumental music in the background, find a comfortable position. If you are sitting in a chair, it is helpful to place both feet on the floor and lie straight and flat on your back.

deeply several times. Become conscious of your breathing. Let it gently fill your body. Do this long guided imagery.

Who is My Neighbor?" (Lk 10:29)

When the meaning of the scriptures in your life, read Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Imagine a man, then held down by a society that refuses to give them jobs, just wages, or sufficient welfare, that man is a person in other countries victimized by Marxist oppression, by totalitarian and military governments, by

each person. The God what is in your heart. Listen to God speaking within you, through the images that come to you from an oppressed group. For example, Juan and his family who are hunted and driven from the rain forests of Brazil to work as a meat supply for fast-food markets; Lee, the woman from Nicaragua whose husband has been shot by the military in Chile who marches around the city square to protest the disappearance years ago of her two sons and daughter; Maria, a garment worker apartment because of their race; Mark, who is refused work since others discovered he has AIDS; John, who lives in a garbage dump; Ellen, a divorced mother of three who cannot find a job above minimum wage or one that carries benefits. Who is your neighbor? Take a few deep breaths. With each breath, God's loving presence fills your body. Be ready. Ask members of the group to share what they saw, felt, experienced throughout the meditation.



Adapted from *Called Into His Presence*, by Virginia Ann Froehle, R.S.M.

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

1. In Jason's words, "Living out the Gospel is not easy." In what ways can you see that by your work you are living out the Gospel?

2. In reflecting on his experience with Alice, Jason comments, "This is why I came (to St. Francis Inn)." Describe an experience in your work that touched you. What did you learn from it?

3. On "not so good days" Jason took time alone. Describe two things that work for you on those "not so good" days.

4. Jason referred to his volunteer year as an internship in spirituality. What similarities do you see between his experience and yours? Where can you see personal growth?

5. Joanne saw a reality at St. Gabriel's she had never known growing up. How is your personal background different from those with whom you work?

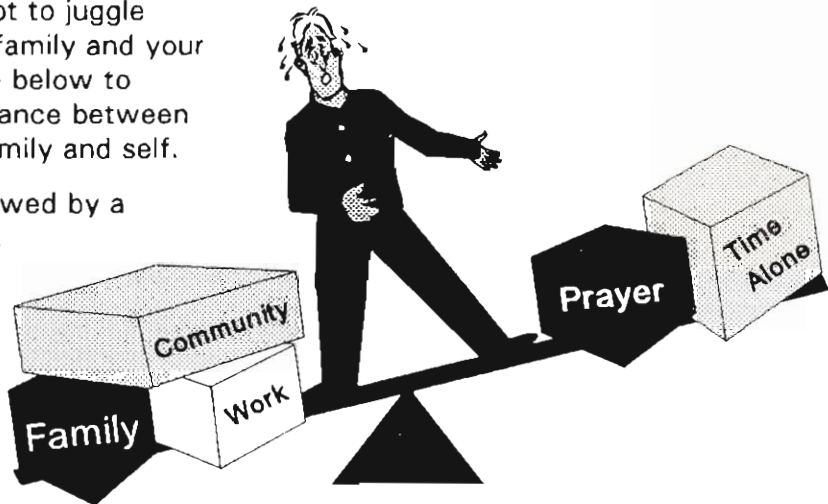
6. Witnessing the children at prayer allowed Joanne to see God through different eyes. When you look at God through the eyes of those you serve, what do you see?

7. Joanne mentions a struggle choosing between community and work. Describe a similar struggle in your experience. How did you resolve it?

Are Things Balanced in Your Life?

As a volunteer, you have a lot to juggle between work, community, family and your own needs. Use the exercise below to determine if things are in balance between work, community, prayer, family and self.

Part 1: Each question is followed by a set of four possible answers. Rank each answer according to how you feel today, right now. Once you've completed this and step two, come together as a community to discuss your results.



Where would you rather be?

- At my work placement
- Alone in my own space
- With my community
- At home with my friends and family

What proves most spiritually fulfilling for you?

- My work
- My time alone
- My time with community
- My time outside of the program

What do you find most fulfilling?

- My work
- My time alone
- My time with community
- My time outside of the program

What is most important for you?

- The needs of those I serve through my work
- Myself and my personal needs
- The needs of my community
- The needs of family and friends from home

Which is most difficult for you?

- Making extra time for work that needs to get done
- Making time for the things I like to do on your own
- Making time for my community
- Making time for calls, letters and contact with home

Part 2: Did any one area seem to get high preference most often? If so, which area? Judging from your results, which areas of your current life need more attention? Are any consuming you more than they should be? Come together as a community, share your results and discuss tactics for balance.

Where are you with Religious Language?

Everyone has their own personal style and comfort level when it comes to conversations about faith and religion. Joanne and Jason wrote freely about striving to make their lives a witness to the Gospel. In thinking about your own style and comfort level, where would you place yourself in the rectangle below? Where do others in your community stand? Discuss your various styles.

Enthusiastic in talking about faith and religion.		Prefer to use non-religious language in sharing what I care about.
Comfortable talking about faith and religion only in select situations (retreats, etc..)		Cringe when I hear any "God Talk."

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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, Paterson, Saint Louis and Sacramento. 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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