



Staying Connected



a publication designed for alumni of Catholic full-time volunteer programs
brought to you by the St. Vincent Pallotti Centers

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Staying Connected to... Decision-making

Today's former volunteers face many challenging choices, including deciding on your career, where and how you want to live, perhaps finding a life-partner, how to use your money, and how best to nurture your spiritual development. The purpose of this issue is to empower former volunteers by enhancing your practical decision-

making skills, discovering your personal decision-making style and helping you deal with the excessive pressure others may put on you to make decisions. We also provide suggestions for furthering your leadership capabilities by translating your decisions into actions that help you and those with whom you live and work.

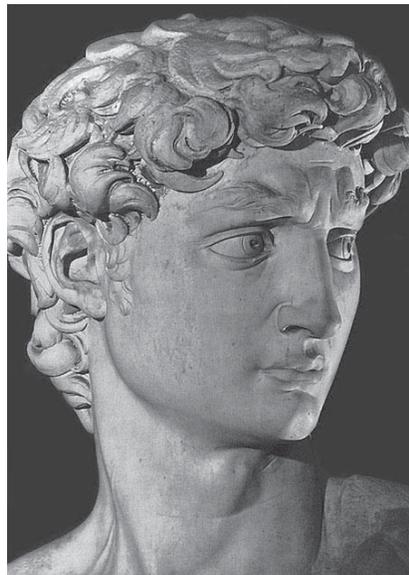
Take your life in your own hands and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame.

- Erica Jong

As A Decision-maker, Who Have You Been? Who Are You Becoming?

Who is the world's greatest artist? What is the world's finest artwork? These questions can be debated, but it's clear that Michelangelo would be among the contenders. For nearly five centuries, his David, Pieta and Sistine Chapel have drawn high praise and admiring crowds. Why so?, you might ask. Here's a theory: it's not simply because he accurately portrayed people, as does a camera. Rather, he also seemed to focus on exceptionally powerful moments in people's lives, primarily when they were making a decision.

Unlike earlier artists who portrayed his triumph over Goliath, Michelangelo captures David at the moment of his decision to fight the giant. Similarly, the Pieta may be more than it appears to be -- namely, the moment of Mary's agony, holding her crucified son's body. Rather, one can argue, it was the moment when she decided to accept her son's tragic fate. A recent interpretation notes Mary's body, oversized compared to Jesus' smaller body, is the artist's way of portraying Mary's prescient vision. While holding her infant son in her lap, she envisions and accepts his future fate as an adult.



In a similar fashion, the creation of Adam, painted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, shows more than the moment of Adam's enlivening. The painting portrays, in the back of the Father's "mind," Eve and, most likely, the infant Jesus, whom the Father touches with his other hand. This shows the Father has already decided Jesus will be born into this world to redeem humanity. Even at the moment of Adam's creation, the Creator was "in touch" with his decision to send his Son, the Second Adam.

With these examples in mind, Michelangelo seems to be highlighting that it is our decisions that make us who we are. In a sense, each one of us is our own "artist in residence," decision by decision, creating our own self-portrait. *Reflect on your decisions and explore what they tell you about who you are and who you may be becoming.*

- Make a list of the more important decisions you have made in the last 5 to 7 years.
- Rank them according to which have made the most impact in your life, with a 1 for the decision having the most consequences, and a 2 for the next, etc.
- Identify which decision was the best... the worst... the most difficult... the easiest.
- In retrospect, if you could change any decision, which would it be and why?
- In light of your decision-making process, complete the following sentence: I am the kind of person whose decisions . . .

A Practical Strategy for Decision-making

Some decisions are so easy, we don't even notice we're making them, like deciding which utensil to use while eating. However, life-altering decision-making does not always come so easily. It is a learned process that takes time to develop. Thus, utilizing decision-making strategies becomes essential.

There are many such strategies for decision-making; here we highlight one called the "Six Thinking Hats." It looks at decisions from a number of different perspectives. No one approach or hat is considered more effective or appropriate than the other. The value of this strategy is that it forces you to move outside your habitual thinking style, and helps you to get a more rounded view of a situation. You can use this tool in groups or on your own.

Each "Thinking Hat" is a different style of thinking, a different way to approach a decision as explained below. As an example, we describe how each hat would approach the decision about whether or not to make a career change.

White Hat:

With this thinking hat you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them.

Example: You choose your career by evaluating all of your options. What are my skills? What skills would I like to further develop? Which organizations would best help me accomplish this?

Red Hat:

Wearing the Red Hat, you look at problems using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. You think of how other people will react emotionally and try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.

Ex: You choose your career based on what would make you (your family, etc.) the happiest. What do I enjoy doing? Which jobs match my value system? Which don't?

Black Hat:

Using Black Hat thinking, you look cautiously and defensively at all the bad points of the decision. Try to see why it might not work. This is important

because it highlights the weak points in a plan. It allows you to eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them.

Ex: You consider the negative consequences of changing careers (e.g., losing seniority, less financial security). You also look at the consequences of not changing careers (e.g., the longer you stay with your current career, the more likely you will get stuck).



Yellow Hat:

The Yellow Hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.

Ex: Changing careers could mean new challenges and an opportunity to try something new.



Green Hat:

The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.

Ex: You see your career as full of possibility. With this hat, you may often think of changing careers based on what projects or ideas are exciting to you at various times.



Blue Hat:

The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When encountering difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, etc.

Ex: You seek out all of the possible resources that could help you make your decision and pull in contacts from your network to assist with the decision on all levels.

Suggestion: Pick one decision you are currently facing. One by one, put on each hat and write down the pros and cons of each approach (choice). Which hat has been your default mode? Which hat would you like to develop further for future use?

More Resources: Edward de Bono created this tool (adapted here) in his book, Six Thinking Hats. If you'd like to continue working with this decision-making strategy, or for more resources on decision-making, go to http://www.pallotticenter.org/Resources/decision_making.htm

If you have accomplished all that you have planned for yourself, you have not planned enough.

- Edward Everett Hale

SPIRITUALITY

Discovering God's transforming presence
in our lives



Give Yourself A Break . . .

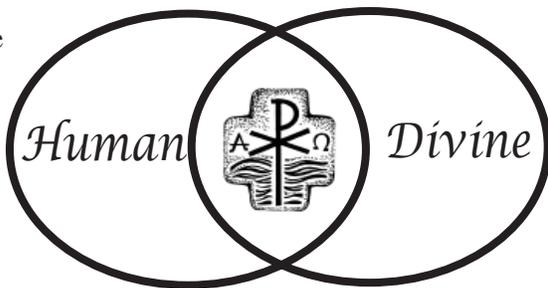
From The Pressures of Decision-making

Decision-making is a central aspect to human and spiritual development, and true to the spirit of the gospels, which regularly call us to choose Christ as our savior and then to consistently live as children of the light. Beyond this religious call to conversion, daily life itself seems to bombard young adults with enormous pressure to make choices about careers, marriage, lifestyle, etc. These pressures come from family, the media, and your own expectations for your life. As former volunteers, you have already experienced what it feels like to be somewhat counter-cultural. This experience affects your decision-making process as well.

We suggest one lesser-known aspect of religion as a resource: liminality, that is, the state of being between structures. Examples might include living on the margins of society, such as moving between the rich and poor or between two different cultures – two common volunteer experiences that often stimulate personal and spiritual growth.

Anthropologist Victor Turner, writing about liminality and community, said: “Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, ‘edge-men,’ who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing.” “Edge-persons” strive to enter into vital relations with others. This vitality comes with the creation or emergence of “communitas,” a lived and felt experience of being in harmony with others in the same state. The volunteer experience of living in community is one good example, and it has probably helped shape your conviction to live “differently” in society.

So, in a break from society’s pressure to “do something,” we take a page from Jesus’ be-attitude message in Matthew 25: 1-16, and encourage you to celebrate who you already are, having been formed in part by your volunteer experience. As you reflect on the following questions, we challenge you to see yourself, at least in part, as an “edge-person.”



- **When I was a volunteer, to what extent was I living the liminal life, between structures? What were those structures (economic, cultural, etc.)?**

Former Volunteer
Sightings in

St. Louis



Restaurants: Meshuggah Cafe, Schlafly’s Tap Room and Bottleworks, Arcelia’s Mexicana Restaurant, Pho Grand and Lemongrass (Vietnamese), Black Thorn Pub, Rigazzi’s (for St. Louis Style Pizza), Pueblo Solis (Mexican), Thai Country Café, Broadway Oyster Bar, Ted Drewe’s Frozen Custard
Neighborhoods: Central West End, Soulard (with Soulard Market), Maplewood, South Grand, the Hill area, University City/Delmar Loop, Main Street in St. Charles
Retreat Centers: White House Retreat (www.whretreat.org), Marianist Retreat Center in Eureka, Pallottine Renewal Center in Florissant, Marie Fonte Solitude in High Ridge
Parishes: St. Francis Xavier Church (“College Church”) at SLU, St. Alphonsus Liguori (“The Rock Church”), St. Pius V Parish on Grand, St. Cronan’s, Washington Univ. 9:00 pm mass, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Anthony of Padua
Organizations: Catholic Action Network, St. Louis Instead of War Coalition, Bridges (Ignatian Sprituality), Karen Catholic Worker House in N. St. Louis, Young Vincentians
Events: Soulard Mardi Gras, St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Cardinals Opening Day Pep Rally, Spirit of St. Louis Marathon, Strassenfest, Great Forest Park Balloon Race, St. Louis Art Fair, Halloween Costume Party in Central West End
Parks: Missouri Botanical Garden, www.mobot.org (free concerts Wednesdays in the summer), Forest Park (zoo, museums, free Shakespeare in the Park in June), Meramec State Park, Shaw Park in Clayton, Laumeier Sculpture Park (www.laumeier.com)
For more information on these and other St. Louis area resources, go to
www.pallotticenter.org/Resources/InYourArea/missouri.htm
Special thanks to everyone who sent in suggestions, especially our St. Louis area programs!

Look for our Profile of the Twin Cities
in the Next Issue of Staying Connected

If you know of resources in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area that no volunteer should be without, let us know!

- **To what extent was my volunteer experience a time of personal and spiritual growth?**
- **Today, to what extent do I see myself as living on an edge? If so, on the edge of what: society, cultures, career, church, family, social life?**
- **Some individual experiences of liminality are dreams (between conscious and unconscious), meditation (active and passive), prayer (divine and human), and ritual (noise and silence). To what extent am I using these experiences to be in touch with my real interiority and identity?**

Even if you are on the right track,
you will get run over
if you just sit there.

- Will Rogers

staying connected

IN THIS ISSUE:

A practical strategy for everyday decision-making, decision-making in Michelangelo's art, former volunteer sightings in the St. Louis area, and more!



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Leaders Make It Happen

"It's not what you can do, it's what you will do that makes you a leader."

In other words, anyone can know HOW to make decisions prudently – there are plenty of resources out there to tell you all about the process and techniques of decision-making. It's another matter entirely to summon up the will to put that knowledge into action, and it's even more daunting to make decisions in group settings.

As leaders, we all ask ourselves the same questions: what will the others think? Will they respect my ideas? Can I motivate them in time to get things done the way they need to get done? We doubt ourselves, sometimes mercilessly, but what we really should do is recognize that it's our initiative, our will, that gives us the special ability to lead; as Kouzes and Posner note in their book The Leadership Challenge, what effective leaders do is make it possible for others to do good work. They enable others to act.

In recent years, consensus decision-making has emerged as a desirable alternative to more coercive leadership models. Nevertheless, even in groups that emphasize and believe in collaboration, someone (or ones) in leadership roles must guide and motivate the group to come to decisions efficiently and effectively. In these cases, effective leaders will use their willpower to enable others to make decisions.

No matter what style of decision-making your organization, company, school, or group uses, your role as a leader is largely determined by your ability to put thought (yours or others') into action. Our suggestion: know that you are able to be decisive through your own considerable will, find strength in that knowledge, and keep these words (from Andy Andrews' The Traveler's Gift) in mind:

"I am a person of action. I inspire others with my activity. I am a leader."

Questions

If you think about the important decisions you have made in your life, who, by word or example, has inspired you to make them?

Who in your life are you currently encouraging to be more decisive, or more effective in their decision-making?

When it comes to translating your decisions into actions, how do you rate yourself?

To what extent do you rely on others to help you make decisions?

What, if anything, might you want to change about your decision-making?

Staying Connected: Assisting in the continued formation of former lay volunteers.

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Mission: To promote lay volunteer service that challenges 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. **Location:** Local Pallotti Centers are in Boston, St. Louis and Oakland, CA.

The National Office is in Washington, DC. **Inspiration:** 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.