



# 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 . . . Sacred Symbols, Religious Questions and Their Impact on Spiritual Development”

The purpose of this issue of *Staying Connected* is to offer suggestions for how you, as alumni of faith-based volunteer programs, can continue to pursue interesting questions and so deepen your understanding and spirituality. In many volunteer programs there is a focus on how to do social analysis and theological reflection, to ask questions such as: what do I see happening in the world, how do I explain it, is my explanation true, how do the gospels shed light on these questions, how can I best respond to these challenges?

In this issue, we focus on religious symbols as another tool for asking yourself valuable questions. The Church places great importance on its religious symbols. Its sacraments, for example, are symbolic, ritual actions. Its gospels are symbolic stories. Its doctrines are symbolic teachings, which have a depth of meaning. What makes these religious aspects “symbolic” is that they have multiple layers of real meaning and values which draw you to imaginatively unpack their significance. When you do this, it’s called “symbolic thinking,” the opposite of “literal-mindedness” which invites no further thought.

### Religious Questions in the Media

By the late Spring of 2006, media around the world reported on the pending arrival of a “religious tsunami.” What was that “tidal wave?” Here are some clues. In India, Christians and Muslims protested by going on hunger strikes. In Mexico, believers held public prayer vigils. In the Vatican, some Church officials cried “travesty” and diocesan newspapers railed against heresy. In the U.S., some evangelical preachers condemned this as the work of Satan. The U.S. Bishops produced an informational DVD, “Jesus Decoded,” to rebut false claims (see: <http://www.jesusdecoded.com/introduction.php>). So what prompted these reactions? It was the May premier of the film based on the thriller novel, *The DaVinci Code*.



By then, more than forty million people had bought the book. But that alone did not provoke the greatest uproar. Rather, the problem came to a head with the showing of the film in theaters. For those who were upset, the film added insult to injury because, although based on a piece of fictional writing, they saw it as offensive to Christian faith. Why offensive? Some said it was because it questioned the foundations of Christianity. Aided by all the media hype, over 77 million people saw the film on its first weekend. Some seemed attracted to the questions the story raised concerning Catholicism. Did DaVinci’s painting of the Last

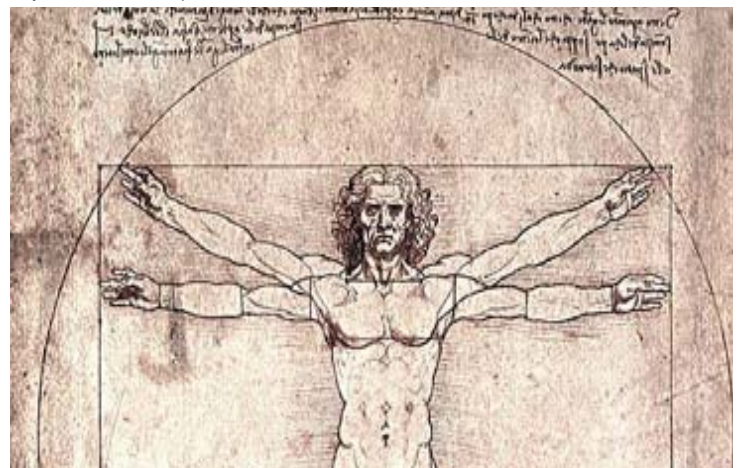
Supper contain hidden symbols that raised questions such as: Were Jesus and Mary Magdalen husband and wife? Has the Church repressed the role of women? When did people first recognize Jesus as divine? Obviously, the four gospels gave no basis for supporting the central question raised by the novel (Was Jesus married to Magdalen?). However, the fact that the symbol-laden fiction caused such a stir points to the power of symbols. It also has had at least one valuable consequence: people began asking questions about their faith and, even more to the point, sought answers. In response to a phone survey of over 1000 Catholics familiar with the DaVinci Code story, 4 out of 10 said they intended to seek the truth by studying the Bible more closely.\*

**“During my volunteer experience, our program director would send us social justice articles that raised lots of questions, which we eagerly discussed during our community nights. This made it easy for me to grow and now I really miss having that type of encouragement to help me keep asking questions and learning.”**

- Composite of volunteers’ statements

This ability to continue to probe and learn about one’s faith is characteristic of healthy and mature spiritual development. This issue of *Staying Connected* wants to promote faith development by helping you explore your experiences, consider their symbolic aspects, ask yourself questions and thereby nurture your spirituality. We hope you are inspired.

\*(*Catholic Standard*, May 25, 2006, p. 13 “Most Catholics not swayed by ‘Da Vinci Code,’ according to poll” which was conducted with 1,048 Catholics familiar with the story. The survey was taken 2 weeks before the film’s release (May 19), and 42% said they intended to “seek the truth” by studying the Bible more closely. More people said they would consult the Bible than any other source.)



# Volunteering May Change the Meaning of Symbols

Think of a stop sign you might encounter on the road. Red, octagonal - means the same thing every time. Now think of a cross. What comes to mind for one person and what comes to mind for another might be very different. One may say, "Wood, rustic, often hangs on a chain," while someone else may say, "Representative of the Resurrection, source of inspiration, symbolic of struggle." Different answers, but neither is less correct than the other. Why? The example of the stop sign is truly that, a sign, which is objective and recognized for one specific meaning. The example of the cross is a symbol, which has a very subjective aspect and may point to multiple meanings.

- What symbols are important to your life? What do they represent? How long have these symbols been a part of your life?

Now think back to childhood. Did you have a back yard or favorite place to play? Remember that place. Have you been back to visit in recent years, or since becoming an adult? For many of us, we remember the playground down the street or the tree in the back yard being huge, but we often visit these places later in life and our perspective changes. We are bigger, and those places seem smaller. The meaning may change, too. The sanctuary of a big tree or the thrill of a rusty old merry-go-round may take on a cumbersome feel when we realize that we must rake leaves or worry about our own children facing potential injury on the rusty old equipment.

## Thinking back to your volunteer experience...

- What was important to you before you volunteered? Did certain people, places, objects, ideas, values, etc. have meaning for you? Are there any symbols associated with these things?
  - Consider one or two of your important things. Did the meaning of these change while you were a volunteer? Did you adopt new symbols for your important people, places, or things as a result of being a volunteer?

## Here's another way to use symbols to reconnect you to your volunteer experience...

Think of the symbols of your life as a large statue. Now think of your pre-, actual, and post-volunteer time as different vantage points around the statue.

- In your mind, move around the statue. Does the statue look the same from the different vantage points? Or did the look and feel of the symbols change with your volunteer experience?
  - What precipitating events or feelings during your volunteer time caused you to see the symbols differently?
  - Did any of the symbols retain their meaning before, during, and after your time of service? Do these symbols represent your core values?
  - What are some of the events since your time of service that have changed the meaning of symbols in your life?

## Reflecting further...

The popular hymn "Open My Eyes" by Jesse Manibusan starts with the verse: "Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see your face. Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see." Later in the song, there is a bridge: "And the first shall be last, and our eyes are opened, and we'll hear like never before. And we'll speak in new ways, and we'll see God's face in places we've never known."

Consider the singular meanings associated with signs, which require no pause for unique thought or reflection. Now think about the important symbols in your life, and the ways in which your eyes were opened during or after your volunteer experience to seeing these symbols, and the people, places, objects, ideas, or values they represent, anew and with myriad meaning.



## How Community Can Be

Thinking back to your time as a full-time volunteer, you probably can remember several meaningful experiences. For many volunteers, the community played a central role in that experience. But have you ever thought about how community can also be a symbol?

Since volunteer communities eat together, pray together, and grow together, community ends up being much more than just a group of people, thus leading to a variety of meanings. How has your view of community changed as a result of your volunteer community experience? **What does community mean to you now?**

Take a moment to think about the symbolism and various meanings you now associate with community. The following may be some examples. Feel free to add your own.

### Community for me means...

- A sense of belonging
- Inclusivity
- Respect
- Flexibility
- Consideration
- Connection, sharing, togetherness
- Openness, honesty, trust
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Recognizing and Incorporating Ritual Into Your Daily Life

How does your typical day begin? If you're like many people, maybe you set your alarm for 20 minutes before you actually want to get up. If you're a morning person, on the other hand, you may jump out of bed as soon as the alarm rings, ready to greet the day. Depending on your personal preferences, you may step into the shower right away, brew some coffee, read the newspaper, or go for your morning run. These are just a few examples of daily routines that we carry out almost without fail.

Consider the following question: Which of your daily routines would be classified as habits, and which could be classified as rituals? A habit is a repeated action without a deeper meaning, while a ritual is a repeated action with various levels of symbolic meaning. There is not a set rule for categorizing actions as habit or ritual; it really depends upon one's personal and cultural context. For example, taking a shower or bath can generally be considered a habitual action. However, bathing in the Ganges River in India takes on a sacred meaning for Hindus, thus becoming a ritual. Breaking bread at dinner may not be a ritual, while breaking bread in the Eucharist is.

- Consider these and other examples while reflecting on your daily routine. Which actions are purely habitual? Which actions are essential to you or have the most meaning for you? What refreshes, calms, or renews your spirit? Why?
- After reflecting briefly on your daily routine, try to evaluate your habits and rituals. Is your day filled with

meaning, or with mundane actions? Do you allow yourself time to think, to pray, to de-stress? If not, how might you add such time into your schedule?

- Next, consider your habits and rituals in the context of faith and spirituality: Does any aspect of your daily routine help you feel closer to God? Do any of your personal habits or rituals support growth in your faith? Why or why not?

Whatever the 'status' of your spiritual life, consider ways that you can discover more meaning in your daily



routines. Some suggestions include: Pray when you have a few minutes of quiet. Seek time for solitude. Look for and appreciate the beauty of God's creation. Be present to the people around you. These can

all be implemented on a daily basis. Symbols are a key aspect of ritual, so you may also want to focus on tangible objects as you look for deeper meaning. Light candles when you pray; use a sacred image or gospel parable for meditation; hang a favorite photograph or piece of art in your quiet space at home. By adding an element of ritual to daily tasks, and by looking more closely for symbols, you will begin to find new meaning—and greater fulfillment—in your daily routines.

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**Any religion...is forever in danger of petrification into mere ritual and habit, though ritual and habit be essential to religion. T.S. Eliot**

## a Lasting Symbol For You

Once you have spent some time reflecting on what community means to you, think about how your understanding of community affects your everyday life.

For example, how do you treat strangers compared to the people you know? Are you more inclined to avoid cursing the bad driver during your morning commute? Do you greet servers in restaurants, bank tellers, or bus drivers? Do you give particular consideration for others' well being? Do you hold doors open for others? Are you more mindful and respectful of others and of shared spaces? Does this make you a better roommate, a better friend, a better spouse?

Examining the symbolism of community can challenge us to stay true to it's meaning. Remember that you are a part of many different communities. Both in your relationships with loved ones and in your interactions with passersby, try to seek out ways to nurture and value community in your life.



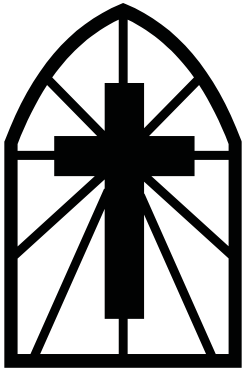


# SPIRITUALITY

Discovering God's transforming presence  
in our lives



## Sacred Spaces: Reminders of God's Presence



**Sacred:** (1) dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity; (2) devoted exclusively to one service or use; (3) worthy of religious veneration; (4) entitled to reverence and respect; (5) of or relating to religion; not secular or profane.\*

What do you identify as sacred? As Catholic Christians in the United States, both our Church and our culture provide us with examples of sacred places. As Catholics we may think immediately of the church building and the tabernacle, while as Americans we may think of the

Supreme Court, national monuments, or even historic sites. Our families, our churches, and our schools teach us to be respectful in sacred places, most often, to observe a reverent silence. While these places are important, it is also essential to find our own 'sacred spaces.' Because of particular experiences or preferences, a personal sacred space has specific symbolism and meaning for you. Your sacred space may be a place where you go to pray or think, or just to be silent. It may be in your home or city, or it may be a thousand miles away.

When asked to reflect on their sacred spaces, a few former volunteers mentioned 'being near the ocean or under a star-filled sky,' 'admiring the moon,' and 'visiting my former volunteer community.' Whether it is a place in nature or in one's own home, each person's sacred space is unique, providing different opportunities for reflection and renewal. Volunteers described their sacred space as providing 'a place to focus on the interior life,' 'an escape from an often unfriendly, rushed world,' and 'a feeling of connectedness to loved ones.' As seen in these examples, sacred spaces challenge us to step outside of our daily tasks, to contemplate and to rest.

• Think about your volunteer experience: What was 'sacred space' for you then? How much time did you spend there? Was it sacred only for you, or for other volunteers as well?

• Next, think about your current living situation, your work and your surroundings. In the midst of your busy schedule, have you found a sacred space? If so, where is it? If not, can you think of any places that might fill that need?

Teacher and scholar Joseph Campbell wrote, 'Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again.' If we truly believe that we are made in the 'image of God,' we need sacred spaces to help us discover not only ourselves, but also the presence of God in our lives.

\*Merriam-Webster Online, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/sacred>.

### Program Anniversaries!

Check out our website at:

[www.pallotticenter.org/Announcements/program\\_anniversaries.htm](http://www.pallotticenter.org/Announcements/program_anniversaries.htm) to view volunteer programs that are celebrating anniversaries! See how long they've been around! Be inspired!

## Former Volunteer Sightings in

## Minneapolis/St. Paul

### Parishes & Retreat Centers:

St. Stephens, 2211 Clinton Ave, Minneapolis, "very progressive parish" // St. Joan of Arc, 4537 3rd Ave South, Minneapolis, [www.stjoan.com](http://www.stjoan.com), social justice events scheduled throughout the year // Our Lady of Guadalupe, 401 Concord St, St. Paul, "especially vibrant Latino community; many Masses in Spanish" // St. Mark's, 2001 Dayton Ave, St. Paul, near colleges, has a youthful crowd // St. Maron's (Maronite Rite), 602 University Ave, Minneapolis, "Roman Rite Catholics can receive communion here but will have an interesting cultural experience" // The Cathedral, 239 Selby Ave, St. Paul // St. Lawrence Catholic Church & Newman Center, 1203 5th St SE, Minneapolis, [www.umncatholic.org](http://www.umncatholic.org), University of Minnesota's Catholic Campus Ministry, features Theology on Tap and a variety of programs for non-student parishioners. // Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery (Retreat Center), St. Paul, 651-777-7251.

### Social Justice & Volunteer Opportunities:

Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis, 651-291-4477, [www.osjspm.org](http://www.osjspm.org) // Catholic Charities, Minneapolis, [www.ccspm.org](http://www.ccspm.org) // Hands-On Twin Cities, 612-379-4900, [www.handsontwincities.org](http://www.handsontwincities.org).

### Events:

Saint Paul Winter Carnival, [www.winter-carnival.com](http://www.winter-carnival.com), end of Jan./beginning of Feb., features ice & snow sculptures, parades, and other events, "definitely a piece of Minnesota culture," make sure to pick up an official button to receive free or reduced admission to events! // Minnesota State Fair, [www.mnstatefair.org](http://www.mnstatefair.org), late August/early September, Snelling Ave in St. Paul, check out the Star Tribune for discounted tickets and promos.

### Great Activities/Places:

Resource Center of the Americas, 3019 Minnehaha Ave, Minneapolis, [www.americas.org](http://www.americas.org), has a great library and bookstore and hosts many free events // \$2 movies! Check out the Riverview Theater, [www.riverviewtheater.com](http://www.riverviewtheater.com), at E 38th St & 42nd Ave S in Minneapolis // Mercado Central, 1515 E Lake St, Minneapolis, [www.mercadocentral.net](http://www.mercadocentral.net), Latin American Marketplace featuring restaurants, shops, and a coffeeshop // St. Martin's Table and Bookstore, Community of St. Martin, 2001 Riverside Ave, Minneapolis, [www.communityofstmartin.org/smt/index.html](http://www.communityofstmartin.org/smt/index.html), outreach ministry focused on peace and justice, features a bookstore and lunch, as well as other events // Walker Art Center, 1750 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis, [www.walkerart.org](http://www.walkerart.org), Thursday nights and the first Saturday of each month are free!

### Restaurants & Coffeeshops:

Gigi's Café, Bryant & 36th, Minneapolis, "amazing food" // Maria's Café in the Ancient Trader's Market, 1113 E Franklin Ave, Minneapolis, Colombian specialties and great breakfast // Seward Community Café, 2129 E Franklin, Minneapolis, all-organic, mainly vegetarian fare // Pumphouse Creamery, 4754 Chicago Ave, Minneapolis, handcrafted, organic ice cream // Cossetta's Italian Market & Pizzeria, 211 7th St W, St. Paul, big and fun, get the pizza // Dunn Brothers, locations throughout the Twin Cities, local company that "supports the community, offers some fair trade coffees, locally roasts their beans, and has free WiFi" // Izzy's (Ice Cream), 2034 Marshall Ave, St. Paul, great ice cream, shop runs on solar power.

### Websites to check out:

[www.thriftyhipster.com](http://www.thriftyhipster.com) and [twincities.citysearch.com](http://twincities.citysearch.com)  
For more resources, visit Resources in Your Area for Minnesota: [www.pallotticenter.org/Resources/InYourArea/minnesota.htm](http://www.pallotticenter.org/Resources/InYourArea/minnesota.htm)

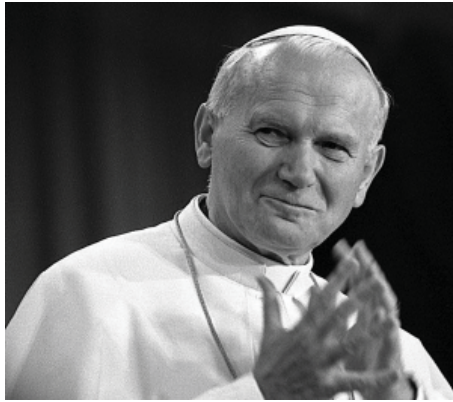
Special thanks to Kim Smolik and Suzanne Herder, CSJ, Program Directors in the Twin Cities, for these great suggestions!

Look for our Profile of the Carolinas  
in the Next Issue of Staying Connected

If you know of resources in North or South Carolina that no volunteer should be without, let us know!

## Real Symbols Have Transforming Power

Persons can become symbols and Pope John Paul II is a good example. Perhaps more than any other, the people of Poland saw this develop. They saw how he, as a young bishop of Krakow, courageously stood up to the communist authorities who had been determined to keep one new city, Nowa Ruda, free of any religious influence or church buildings. After years of challenging them, then Bishop Karol Wojtyla finally gained permission and, with thousands of volunteers, built the first church in the factory city. After he became Pope in 1978, the Gdansk shipyard workers risked their lives by going on strike and barricading themselves inside the shipyard gates. As the world watched this drama, the workers displayed Pope John Paul's photo on the gates. He had become the Polish peoples' symbol of freedom from domination. That weakening of Soviet power spread to Eastern Europe and led to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Real symbols convey power and do transform lives.



As the sources for the Eucharistic bread and wine, the wheat and grapes evoke images pointing Christians to extensive and profound religious meanings. Participation in the Eucharist, for example, the very heart of its communal celebrations, evokes the rich values of: communion with Jesus, sharing a nurturing meal, celebrating the Passover meal with its escape from slavery (from sin), offering a sacrifice, sharing in Jesus' body which, like the bread, has been broken for us, forming a community (whole loaf) which is a leaven for transforming society. Participants in the Eucharist, in turn, live to be broken for others and participate in saving humanity from the effects of sin.

**Historic roots:** Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:35), as the true vine (John 15), Last Supper, Eucharist and Passover (Luke 22, John 13). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical\\_roots\\_of\\_Catholic\\_Eucharistic\\_theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_roots_of_Catholic_Eucharistic_theology)



This Christian symbol is associated with the belief that Jesus is the Lord

and the center of one's life. The fish is one of the earliest symbols for Christ and a play on the Greek word for fish, ICHTHUS, an acronym for Jesus Christ, God's Son and Savior.

**Historic roots:** Several gospel stories associate the fish with events which resemble Eucharistic gatherings (Matthew 14, John 6, Luke 24).

Other gospel stories identify

Jesus' disciples as fishers of men (Mark 1, Luke 5, John 21) and early Christian writers associate fish with converts, born in baptismal waters. Jesus is the great Ichthus and Christians are the little fishes (Tertullian, early Christian theologian).

[http://www.library.nd.edu/about/symbols\\_of\\_christ/fish\\_living.shtml](http://www.library.nd.edu/about/symbols_of_christ/fish_living.shtml)



The Cross is closely associated with the power of transforming life

from sin to grace, from despair to hope, from powerlessness to competence, from defeat to victory, from death to life, both for humanity as a whole and for individuals. Scriptures refer to the cross as a sign of God's foolishness (1 Cor. 1:17) contradicting human wisdom, as the "tree" which saves (Acts 5:30, 1 Peter 2:24) and is a counterpoint to the tree of knowledge from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) associated with the forbidden fruit and the fall. **Historic roots:** Jesus' crucifixion (John 19) Constantine's vision, crusaders' emblem,

and its abundant presence in Christian art, architecture and jewelry.

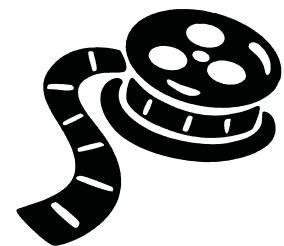
<http://www.request.org.uk/main/history/romans/constantine.htm>



## Searching for Symbols in your Favorite Flicks

For many people in today's world, movie night is a well-loved tradition. We savor the smell of hot popcorn, the comfort of curling up on the sofa, and the pleasant escape into the 'world' of the movie. Next time you plan a movie night; why not choose a film that inspires reflection and discussion? We recommend the following movies for their religious symbolism. You will be surprised at what you see when you watch these films from a symbolic perspective...be sure to discuss with family or friends!

- **Contact** (1997) starring Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey
- **Superman Returns** (2006) starring Kevin Spacey and Brandon Routh
- **O Brother, Where Art Thou?** (2000) starring George Clooney
- **Devil's Advocate** (1997) starring Keanu Reeves and Al Pacino
- **The Lord of the Rings Trilogy** (2001-2003)
- **The Mission** (1986) starring Robert deNiro and Jeremy Irons
- **The Poseidon Adventure** (1972, 2006)
- **Central Station** (1998) a Brazilian film starring Fernanda Montenegro
- **Angels in America** (2003) starring Al Pacino, Meryl Streep and Emma Thompson
- **Chocolat** (2000) starring Juliette Binoche, Johnny Depp and Dame Judi Dench





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## IN THIS ISSUE:

Sacred symbols,  
rituals, movies to check  
out, former volunteer sightings  
in the Twin Cities,  
challenging  
questions and more!

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE FUTURE EDITIONS OF STAYING CONNECTED VIA E-MAIL? IF SO, PLEASE LET US KNOW BY E-MAILING US AT:  
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## *Leaders Excel at “Symbolic Thinking”*

“One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” These words, broadcast by astronaut Neil Armstrong as he stepped onto the moon’s surface, will be remembered for generations as a challenge to think of all humanity as a united family. He, as the first person to walk on the moon, recognized that he stood for the aspirations not simply of himself as an individual or of the U.S. space program, but of all humanity. He could have said: “So there you Soviets, the U.S. has won the space race,” and that would have reduced the event to having but one meaning: competition. Rather, he took the higher road and invited all humanity to share in this achievement. This demonstrated “symbolic thinking” in that it recognized and articulated deeper, more significant levels of meaning embodied in the event: humanity is one single family.

Who else comes to mind as people who excelled at symbolic thinking, at calling attention to a bigger picture and more nuanced aspects of life? Consider or explore these examples and what they say about how leaders use symbols:

- Mahatma Gandhi’s pilgrimage to the salt mines of India
- Martin Luther King’s march to Selma
- Mother Teresa’s daily care and contact with the “untouchables”

Give some thought to the symbolic thinking and journeys Jesus made and the transformations he caused. Read the following gospel stories: Mark 4: Jesus instructed disciples by using symbolic parables; John 6: Jesus empowers disciples to be leaders by feeding the multitude; John 12: on Palm Sunday Jesus journeys to Jerusalem as a servant leader and as Light; Luke 2: Jesus teaches followers to prioritize Sabbath, hunger and disobedience. Ask: what aspects of leadership do these stories illustrate? Alternatively, consider the lyrics of the folk tune “Lord of the Dance”\* and ask: What symbols of Christ do the lyrics evoke for you? What were some of the “small steps” and “leaps” he took for individuals? For humanity? In what ways can you follow in his footsteps?

\* For lyrics to "Lord of the Dance," see <http://www.stainer.co.uk/lotd.html>.

### *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.