Shared Visions

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

— The people who bring you ***Connections*** *—*

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• Assessing your values, gifts and weaknesses through self-exploration and being open to new perspectives.

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...and more!!

Struggle, Growth, Healing and Transformation

by Jeff Campbell
Marianist Voluntary Service Communities (MVSC)

"As a youth, I chose safety; now, as an adult, I must choose to struggle." (From a C.S. Lewis quote used in the movie "Shadowlands", based on the C.S. Lewis biography of the same name, by his step-son)

"You might not be living in community until the point when one of those with whom you live seems to you the most irritable person in the world." (paraphrase from Community and Growth by Jean Vanier)

Fear of failure. Insecurity in relationships. Work-aholism. Afraid of confrontation. "Paralysis by analysis." Perfectionism. You've just met some of my oldest friends -- or, actually, my worst enemies. Whether I like it or not, they're part of me. Have been for a while -- will be for even longer.

Though I finished college with the idea of just wanting to help people, I never would have imagined that two years of volunteering and living in community would go far beyond that noble, but simple intention. Those two years took me on an often confusing and unsettling journey of self-discovery during which I was also blessed with the chance to stare this "shadow side" of myself in the face. A lot of things played a role in this -- along with a challenging, healing God. But, two personal challenges proved most crucial.

I spent my second year in Cleveland, Ohio, helping to supervise the renovations of a downtown apartment building for homeless people at one of the leading nonprofit development corporations in Cleveland. There, I figured I'd learn all there was to know to get a leg up in the field. When I started, I even received permission to hire people from the nearby day center for the homeless as laborers for the project.

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Finding Strength in Our Diversity

by Alison Gramann
L'Arche

> ***"More difficult than accepting other people's talents and weaknesses, was accepting my own weaknesses."***

Jean-Claude would roll into the kitchen in his wheelchair early in the morning while I was making breakfast, sit with me for a while, and then leave to open the curtains. Francine would see me from far away and roll her wheelchair up and grab me. Laughing, she would put me in a headlock. The friendships with the core-members (L'Arche residents with mental disabilities) in my house were confidence building and important, allowing me to have patience with the real challenge: living in community with the whole team of volunteers. Another volunteer assistant and I agreed that at L'Arche, where we were living in community with the core-members, our fellow assistants were the ones who required more of our energy and patience.

We were from five countries, had varying educational backgrounds, ran meetings differently, delegated differently, and participated differently in the team of assistants. Living in such a diverse team was wearing, as much as we'd all like to say that we are open-minded and excited to have exposure to other cultures. Sure, these differences were neat. I learned about international cooking among other things. But, there were often times after someone had yelled that I thought, "you just don't *do* that!" I had a hard time understanding that not everyone would want to speed through the house getting things done in the most efficient way possible. Or, I didn't understand how people's tempers could be so short.

I used to be a little resentful when another assistant would sit on the couch while I was working away on "our" responsibilities, like cleaning or tending to someone's needs. However, I learned to be thankful that we each had different priorities. (I also learned to ask

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Who could ask for more? I sure got more than what I asked -- but in a very difficult way. The more I did, the more the office asked me to do. I worked long hours wearing many different hats on the job: supervising construction of a building at one-third occupancy; weekly payroll; coordinating the laborers from the homeless center; managing the federal Uniform Relocation Act clauses that regulated our actions with the residents; tracking our expense reporting for the city's development department; handling contractor bidding; and the list goes on. (AREAS IN NEED OF WORK: Work-aholism. Perfectionism.)

> ***"Daily I faced nearly overwhelming stress and anxiety ...."***

Did I mention that my only housing experience was during college, with Habitat for Humanity rehabs? I was in over my head. Parts of the job actually appealed to that shadowy workaholic and perfectionist in me. I struggled fiercely, without much help or training from my office, it seemed. Daily I faced nearly overwhelming stress and anxiety over the endless tasks needing to be done at the same time, never with a second to spare. The housing agency's director reminded me repeatedly that the project was still behind schedule and over-budget (which it had been for the two years before I even began there!), and that "the job was all riding on me". (NOTE TO SELF: Fear of failure. Afraid of confrontation.)

While this went on, my community was also forced to confront one of our members whose drinking problem began to affect all of us. When one incident led to his incarceration, we finally had to face the problem head on. We met regularly with a counselor to explore our feelings and decide how we could respond. We asked him to leave the community upon being released and to then face a problem that could dominate the rest of his life. This brought out in me a flurry of personal issues: my inability to express my anger, feeling unable to confront my community member face to face, and reliving my own family's dysfunctional and enabling behaviors. ("So this is what I look like on the inside!?!" -- Afraid of confrontation. Insecurity in relationships. Paralysis by analysis.)

The year didn't end poetically. Work remained stressful down to the very last day without any healthy resolution. But I learned a sense of my own limits and the negative effects of my perfectionism and work-aholism. In community, we lost a member, but pulled together through an incredibly challenging and difficult time -- and we learned to depend on prayer and each other in a way we never expected. I saw parts of me I'm not sure I ever wanted to face.

But God wanted me to grow up a little those two years, to give my inner-self a good long look in the mirror -- and, as C.S. Lewis used to say, that couldn't happen without the Master Sculptor chipping away, sometimes with painful blows, at my life. Someday, perhaps, through trusting faith and much perseverance, God would transform the rough-hewn stone in my life into a precious sculpture. If I didn't have those mixed blessings in the form of such struggles, I would never have awakened to such immense issues in my life. It wasn't pretty, and at times it hurt a lot; but it was growth and healing -- and thanks be to God for that! +

> ***"God wanted me to grow up a little those two years...."***

Questions for Jeff's article:

1. Sometimes, volunteers become overwhelmed by others' needs. Step back and think about where you could set boundaries and limits or where you could use additional training and support. Identify resources or people you could consult to improve your situation.

2. Jeff feels grateful for all that was awakened in him, even during the difficult times. Imagine God watching over a difficult situation of your own. Now, imagine God looking lovingly and unconditionally at you and each person involved. Contrast your feelings before and after this meditative experience.

3. One of Jeff's interpretations was, "...God wanted me to grow up a little...." In what ways do you feel you have grown-up since you started your volunteer experience?

main course

Savory Soup...from Scraps!

You can bring a fresh perspective by re-framing any situation. Instead of discarding "left-overs" from your favorite meals, save these tasty morsels in a container in your freezer. Once you fill the container, add the frozen bits of veggies, meats, etc. to a basic broth, and your "rejects" become the main ingredients in a savory soup!

Here are some ideas for a broth:

- Use leftover water from steaming vegetables or boiling potatoes.
- Use leftover bean-cooking water.
- Boil limp vegetables & skins from carrots, potatoes & onions (cleaned, of course!) for 30 min. then strain veggies and taste!

Broth ideas taken from *The Enchanted Broccoli Forest*, by Mollie Katzen.

Miracle

Do not pray for easy lives;
Pray to be stronger.

Do not pray for tasks
equal to your powers;
Pray for powers equal to your tasks.

Then the doing of your work
shall be no miracle,
But you shall be a miracle.

Every day you shall wonder at yourself,
At the richness of life which has come to
you by the grace of God.

~by Philip Brooks

"Finding Strength in Our Diversity" continued from page 1

for a hand from the person sitting down.) A young Belgian guy on our team spent a lot of time sitting. After a few weeks, we started to notice his love of baking cakes for us. Then, his light-heartedness and jokes became more noticeable. Even after that, I learned how to talk to the core-members by observing his ease with people. I learned a lot from him. Sure, maybe I could keep the team organized and make sure the house was running in order, but I couldn't keep everyone laughing.

More difficult than accepting other people's talents and weaknesses, was accepting my own weaknesses. One of our community leaders said something to me about a group I was leading. She said, "We chose *you*, not someone else [to lead this group]." Her encouragement helped me to remember that my gifts were important to them. Spending too much time trying to accept everyone's differences shouldn't have prevented me from standing up for myself. And, the gifts that other people had were also very important, but not so important that my own should become less important. Becoming too sensitive to the needs of everyone else in the house was also dangerous to me. I had to learn to stick up for myself.

> ***"Ah,* that's *what community life is about."***

"Ahhh, c'est *ça* la vie communautaire!" (Ah, *that's* what community life is about.) This was a famous expression in our house, whether we discovered someone else doing our own dirty dishes, or if we had been searching half an hour for shared car keys. The smile was a little more forced in the latter situation, but it summed up my point. It was difficult; I learned a lot from my peers; and I also learned that even if I couldn't do everything, it was okay. No one expected me to, but me. Also important was learning to stand my ground, which I will always have trouble with. Community life with L'Arche was exceptional. After all, Francine and Jean-Claude accepted all of us and it wasn't always easy for them. "*That's* what community life is about." +

Questions for Alison's article:

1. Alison called community an "exceptional" experience. What are you enjoying most about living in community? Share that feedback with your community. Are there steps you can take to improve other aspects of this lifestyle?

2. Through the examples of the L'Arche core-members, Alison concluded that accepting others and being willing to be accepted by others was what community was all about. Who are your role-models of patience, respect and acceptance in your own community?

3. In working to accept everyone else's talents and weaknesses, Alison almost lost sight of her own. Take time to think about and list your own gifts that you bring to your job and community life. What can you do to be more accepting of both your gifts and shortcomings?

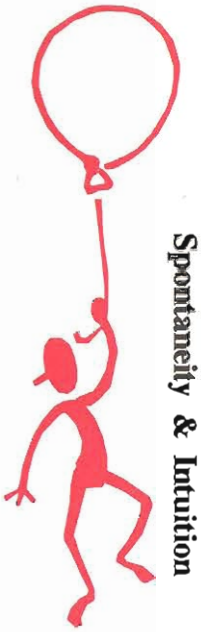
Discovering Inner Courage By Nurturing the Divine Within

Apollo's gifts: Reason & Planning

According to the psychologist Rollo May (The Courage To Create), the ancient Greeks overcame foes by praying for the gifts of two gods. The Greeks believed that these powers, when combined in the right way, would put the individual in touch with great personal courage.

Apollo exemplified the courage of maintaining your convictions by relying on reason and planning. **Dionysius** provided a model for taking risks and for approaching life with creativity.

Together, these traits helped nurture inner **COURAGE**, which Christians recognize as a divine gift of the Holy Spirit.



Dionysius' gifts: Spontaneity & Intuition

Many volunteers, in deciding to dedicate themselves to doing service, drew on their own courage. They used the same two gifts that make up courage: **Dionysius' risk-taking** to enter into unknown situations, and **Apollo's conviction,** to make a difference or answer the gospel call. Throughout the volunteer experience, each person gains strength for the journey by relying on his/her unique combination of spontaneity and reason.

We applaud your decision to volunteer and we affirm your efforts. Volunteers sometimes run into big challenges during their volunteer experience, as we read in Alison and Jeff's articles. In community life, Alison found she needed to start standing up for herself. Jeff discovered he needed to face several of his "isms," (work-aholism, perfectionism).

Perhaps you too have had obstacles or challenges this year that require you to be courageous in order to move forward. Take some time to assess the personal combination of Apollo's and Dionysius' gifts of conviction and risk-taking that you bring to your workplace, your community, your relationships.

Convictions + **Risk Taking** = **Flexible Strength**

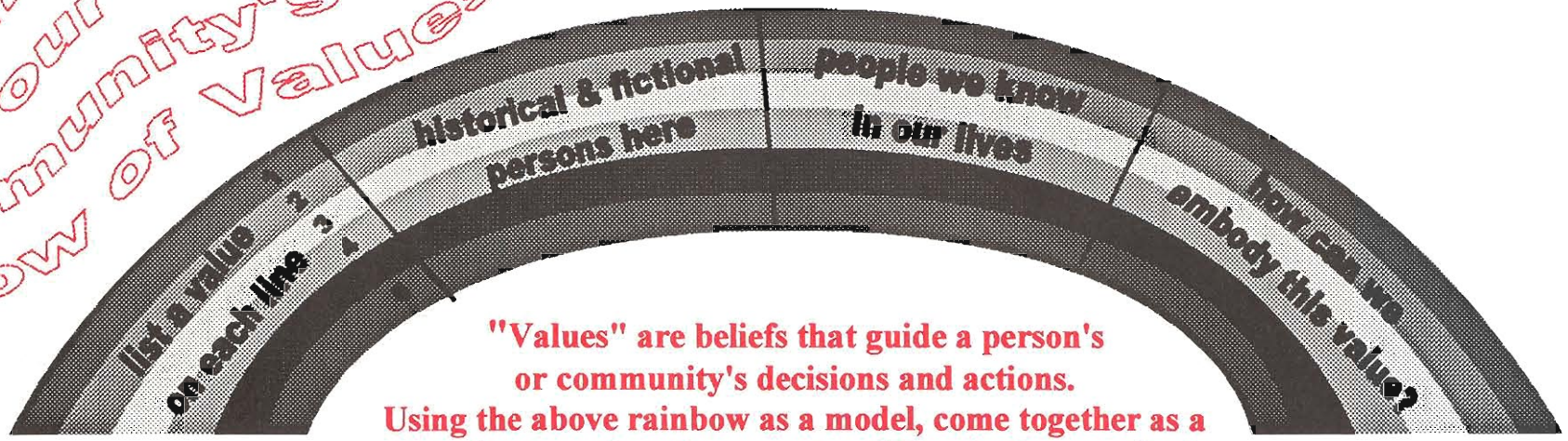
We all have convictions. Some want to "make a difference." Others want to live out gospel values. Have you ever thought hard about what you stand for? Try to write down values that you believe in and define them. Think about the reason behind them and how these values are a part of your life.

Whenever one is faced with a challenge, it is quite a risk to take action. There are different risks if we don't take action. Sometimes a little creativity helps in order to open us up to a new perspective or idea. Is there something good that you are hesitating to act on because it is too much of a risk? How can you push yourself forward to take action?

Staying open (flexible) while holding on to your convictions (strength) isn't easy. Seeking and developing within yourself both flexibility and strength will help you get over barriers in life. Think about your challenge and then meditate on ways in which becoming more flexible would help, perhaps in re-defining your goals or new ways to accomplish your objective. List the strengths you bring to this challenge. They are God's gifts within you.

Judeo-Christian figures offer us a similar path to developing courage by integrating contrasting values. To strike a balance within yourself, try replacing these traditional Apollonian/Dionysian images with Old Testament biblical images of the KINGLY (maintaining the status quo/defending established convictions) and the PROPHETIC (agitating for change and encouraging risk-taking). We can cultivate both images within us to find courage.

Naming Your Community's Rainbow of Values



"Values" are beliefs that guide a person's or community's decisions and actions. Using the above rainbow as a model, come together as a community to make a large poster, filling in the arc of colors with values that will help you live and work better together as a genuine community.

Directions for group activity:

1. Give everyone a few minutes to privately make a list of 6 values or qualities that are needed to maintain a healthy community.
2. Now share your lists aloud and, if needed, give a brief explanation of why a particular value is important for healthy community living.
3. Come to an agreement on a common list of six values that seem to be most essential for your community.
4. Use a large sheet of paper and draw a rainbow with 6 thick stripes. Write one of the values you agree on in each of the stripes in the 1st section of the rainbow (see above model). Throughout this exercise the information you add for each value will go across the same stripe of the rainbow.
5. In the 2nd rainbow section, for each value, have every person identify either a real person from history or a fictional character from literature or film who embodies this particular value.
6. In the 3rd section of the rainbow have everyone write the name of a person they know (in real life) who exemplifies each value.
7. In the last section of the rainbow, list ways your community can embody each value or how you can support a value that may need more work in your community.
8. Go back and have each person take turns drawing a ☺ or a ☹ next to each value listed in the 1st section indicating whether that person feels the community is good at incorporating this value or the community needs to work on this value.
9. Hang this poster up and, in a month, revisit it as a community to discuss how you're doing and to address any changes needed.

For a "Personal Rainbow," list values that nourish you. Identify people you know who live them out, people in your volunteer program who could teach you more about the values, and ways to better incorporate them into your own volunteer experience. Have fun!

Biblical Reflection:
Volunteers Caring for the Wounds of Christ

Alison's and Jeff's articles invited volunteers to courageously face the limitations, struggles, interpersonal differences and shadow sides of their living, working and personal situations. By addressing our limits and boundaries, we can notice God's transforming presence at work in our lives.

Read John's gospel, 20:24-28 which describes Jesus inviting the doubting apostle Thomas to touch Jesus' wounds.

- *What effects do you think touching these shadowy wounds had on Thomas?*
- *Are there ways you are a "doubting Thomas," doubting yourself, your co-workers, fellow volunteers, clients or God's love for you?*
- *In what ways might your volunteer service, with its addressing the limitations of yourself and those you serve, actually be a form of touching the wounds of Christ?*

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The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center:

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. Local Pallotti Centers are located in Boston, Memphis, Paterson, St. 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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