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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Living the Passover Experience

We are entering the Easter season. How are you celebrating? What does Easter have to do with Volunteering? Everything... Check it out:

- Articles by former volunteers, Christy and Bill on "passing over" into the lives of those they served. *(pgs. 1,2,5)*
- Experiencing the Triduum and how this pinnacle of the Christian year parallels the volunteer experience. *(p. 3-4)*
- "How to Keep the Easter Spirit Alive" *(p. 6)*

Sharing a Personal Passover

by Christy Keyes
La Finca del Niño (Farm of the Child)

Passover. Lately it has acquired a new meaning for me, a process rather than an event. Although I always understood it as a celebration of faith and our relationship with God, now after volunteering, those words have a much more personal meaning. Passing over from one setting or one community to another in one respect defines our volunteer experience. In some way or another we all work with those on the margins of society: children, the poor, the sick, imprisoned, lonely, or disabled. Our experience is built around entering into their lives somehow, passing over into their world.

I left four years ago to work in Central America to help establish an orphanage outside a small coastal town in northern Honduras. Like most of us, I think, I had no idea what I was getting into. No matter how much we try to be realistic when we enter our volunteer work, we are still excited and motivated by what we will *do*, how we will *serve*. I went to Honduras knowing that I would learn from the experience and from the people, but it took me a long time to realize that this is the whole point.

It was in the first few weeks that I met Deysi and her family. They lived in the village adjacent to the property where we were beginning to build the orphanage and primary school. One of our first goals was to meet the people in the village and to let them know who we were and what the project was about. Like most of the villagers, Deysi lived with her husband and seven children in a one room mud and thatch hut. They ate rice and beans almost exclusively and on a good day, two meals. Deysi's life was hard.

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An Open Ear, An Open Heart

by Bill Brennan
Holy Cross Associates

Two months after I graduated from college, I packed most of my belongings into a car and headed across the country to Portland, OR to begin my year as a Holy Cross Associate (HCA) volunteer. With me on the trip was one of my future housemates (we'd known each other for 96 hours before leaving), a three days' supply of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and a mind full of questions.

I used the forty-hour drive out west to share my concerns with my housemate. Since I was the first HCA to be placed at JOIN: A Center for Involvement, I did not know what to expect. I vaguely remembered reading that JOIN's mission was related to homelessness and teenagers. What did I know about homelessness, let alone teenagers? Would I be working with homeless teenagers? If not, what would I need to do to connect and build relationships with the homeless folks at JOIN? (I had visions of everyone learning I went to high school in the Bronx and college in Indiana, thereby expecting me to be able to play basketball. Scientists still use me as an example that all people from these two places do not have hoops in their genes.) My housemate and I decided on two things when we arrived in Portland. First, I needed to be patient in order to build relationships with the folks with whom I would work. Second, I should spend less time talking and more time listening. This probably stemmed from the fact that I talked most of the drive out to Portland.

> ***"First, I needed to be patient in order to build relationships with the folks with whom I would work. Second, I should spend less time talking and more time listening."***

I showed up at JOIN for my first day of work both excited and nervous. JOIN's Executive Director, Rob Justus (no pun intended), wanted to acquaint me with my

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She took care of her family with almost no resources. The backbreaking work of each day required her to start at 4 a.m. to grind the corn for the tortillas. She spent hours at the river washing clothes on the rocks. As Deysi became one of my best friends in the village, I felt more and more privileged to know this woman of uncommon strength and tremendous faith. She was my teacher. I was the one with the college education who was teaching her kids to read and write. Yet she was the one teaching me about enduring and holding onto faith when nothing was sure, not even the next meal. I had known faith and courage, but any of my trials paled in comparison to those that filled her life everyday. Deysi and I reached a point where the details of our drastically different lives didn't matter. We shared each other's joys and pains.

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We don't often allow ourselves to think this way, valuing the relationship over the activity or progress. Most of us in a position to volunteer have the blessings of education, opportunity, and a support system. Yet when we make the decision to volunteer we must take ourselves out of our familiar and comfortable settings to enter into a different community. We work to take ourselves out of positions of distinction and move to positions of sameness, to take ourselves out of a world that wants to make us interesting and important in order to recognize the "human sameness" that connects us. When we pass over and beyond the circumstances that shape our individual lives, we can be present to one another, accompany one another, share our lives and learn from each other.

This is what Jesus did and what we are called to do. He came to the world, passing over into the world of the powerless and the marginalized, not of the powerful and important; to be the same not different; to accompany us and share our pain, not take it away.

"This is what Jesus did and what we are called to do. He came to the world... to accompany us and share our pain"

My relationships like those with Deysi and with the children at the project defined my experience. I didn't have *to do* anything to learn from them and about them. Yes, much was accomplished and progress was made. But it was not what we *did* that made it valuable. It was more about who we were for each other, what we ultimately recognized in each other and shared. +

Reflection Questions for Christy's Article:

1. For Christy, *being* with others was as important as *doing* for them. Try setting aside time to just *be* with your community or clients. What can this time teach you about "human sameness?"

2. Christy compares the volunteer experience to Jesus' role in our lives, passing over and accompanying us on our journey. How do you allow Christ to be your companion? Are you meeting the challenge of sharing the road with those in your life?

3. From whom have you learned significant or life-changing lessons? How was that person effective in teaching you? What are ways to incorporate these skills into your life?

4. Who, like Christ, has shown you a courageous way of living, suffering and overcoming?

special event

Communion Bread

On Holy Thursday, or any day you have a community meal, try making unleavened bread to commemorate the eucharist. While breaking bread, share a message Jesus might have for you and your community if He were at your table during this meal.

1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour
1/2 cup white flour
3/4 tsp. salt
3/4 tsp. baking soda
3/4 cup cold water
3 Tblsp. honey
2 heaping Tblsp. shortening

Mix and sift dry ingredients together until blended. Add water and honey. Blend in the shortening. Knead until a good texture. Form into a round loaf and bake for half an hour at 350 degrees.

Passing Over Into Others' Lives

The climax of Jesus' entire life took place during his last three days: Holy Thursday evening through Easter Sunday morning, from his Last Supper on Thursday to his Resurrection on Sunday. Today, the Church celebrates these Three Days (Triduum, in Latin) concluding with Easter as the most important time of the liturgical year. The richness of the Triduum is that we "pass over" into the lives of those around us.

Historical Background:
The religious context of that first Easter took place during the Jewish feast of Passover. "Passover" is the 3,000 year old Jewish celebration that coincides with our 2,000 year old Christian Easter festivity. Passover is the name given to the Jewish Seder supper which celebrates the Exodus and the Jews' final evening meal before their escape from slavery in Egypt. (Exodus, chapter 12 ff).

Christ's final three days urge each of us, in our daily lives, to live out the Easter mystery of death and resurrection. We are all called to follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice, as we die to self and seek God's will in our lives. To make the pass-over shift, from being *self-centered* to being *other-centered*, no longer concerned simply with "me" but rising to a new life of "we." Each of us is called to be open as God *passes over* into our lives and challenges us to do the same, into the lives of our neighbors.

Volunteers Have An Advantage:
The experience of being a volunteer provides some natural bridges to cross over into others' lives. This idea of a volunteer's "passover" parallels the Triduum in three ways: through *service* to and with others, identifying with their *suffering*, and *sharing* life-giving *hope and joy*.

Holy Thursday: Passing Over through Service

The Church begins the Triduum with Holy Thursday's service of the washing of the feet and the command that we do so to others. Feet that in Jesus' time walked through sand and dust all day long. Feet that were cracked, dry, dirty. Washing of the feet was a job of the servants. And yet, we are called to do this for each other: to embrace people in their most vulnerable state.

On Holy Thursday we also celebrate the Eucharist: communion with God and one another. We are sharing in the bread that *is* Christ, broken for our sake. We are nourished by Christ and become bread ourselves, "broken" in sacrifice to one another.

As volunteers, we are constantly reminded of vulnerability and brokenness. We see it in our own limitations and in the struggles of those we serve.

This Easter season reflect on the meaning behind Holy Thursday. Discover the symbols in the Passover story and what they can mean for you. Reflect on the service you are giving and how you treat those around you each day. Do you stop to "wash" their feet? How are you "bread" for others? How do you live Jesus' example that service is crucial to our existence?

Activities for Holy Thursday:

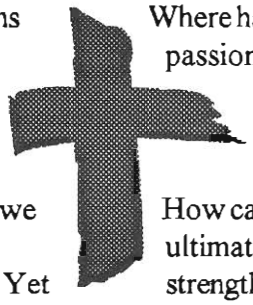
- A sit-down dinner is still one of the most intimate ways to share with other people. A communal meal conveys hospitality, respect and acceptance. Share a meal with your housemates or others with whom you don't normally break bread.

- Do something special for people who deserve thanks and recognition, but may not always get it! (Bake cookies for a receptionist, talk to the person at the newspaper stand, etc.)

- Commit yourself to learn more about an issue important to you: world hunger, homelessness, forgiveness of third world debt, or any topic.

Good Friday: Passing Over through Suffering

Jesus, by his crucifixion on Good Friday, became one with the suffering of humanity. It seems that every day we learn about more suffering and injustices in the world. The stories of limitations and oppressions affecting people we know and people around the world can be overwhelming. Yet through his Passion, Jesus teaches us to recognize how others are suffering, to affirm their dignity and to help unburden their crosses.



To witness suffering is part and parcel of full-time volunteer work. Recognizing our own suffering is also a part of Good Friday's theme: to look within and to reflect on global suffering, suffering in our own realm and Christ's ultimate suffering for us. Where have you witnessed Christ's passion and death in your workplace or neighborhood?

How can the example of Christ's ultimate action be a source of strength in suffering?

Try to keep Good Friday free from distractions, to slow down, pray and fast.

Activities for Good Friday:

- Gather and pray around a candle for those you know who have suffered or are suffering. Share stories about them. Give thanks for their courage and pray for gifts of continued strength and patience with their struggles.

- Disability Evening: Assign each person in your community a disability (various physical challenges) for the evening. Raise your own awareness of others' struggles and the crosses they bear. Discuss your reactions to the experience with each other.

- Write Easter cards or "thinking of you" support mail to people you know who are suffering with cancer, AIDS, MS, or other hardships. Remember those whose families are struggling. Be truly present to those you see today who are in pain.

Easter Sunday: Passing Over through Hope of Ressurection

From the despair of Good Friday to the hope of Easter Sunday, Jesus shows us through his resurrection, that hope triumphs over death!

Easter brings the joy of new life and new perspectives. We can see beyond the suffering, to be thankful for life's experiences and to become agents of change and renewal.

Volunteers are challenged to live the Easter celebration each day: to reject violence and to embrace love, acceptance and hope. By bringing hope to those who fear, volunteers help empower others with the Easter message, so they can share in a resurrection that leads to new life. What does Easter mean to you?

How have you been changed by this great mystery? What signs do you see of hope and renewal?

How can you bring about Christ's resurrection in your daily life? How can you be a reminder to others of our new life in Christ?

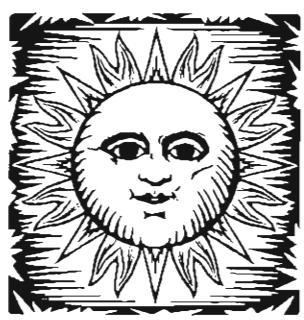
Activities for Easter Sunday:

- Use plastic eggs for an Easter Egg Hunt and insert hopeful messages or quotes.

- Share with each other your favorite Easter traditions from childhood. Try to incorporate each person's favorites into your day!

- Cook a potluck dinner and welcome those who you know are celebrating alone. Keep hope alive!

- Emerging from Lenten fasting, plan a midnight feast outdoors! In the peace of darkness, appreciate the simple beauty of nature at night. Reflect on the interconnectedness of our world. Pray together for the blessings of God's grace and peace throughout the world.



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new surroundings right away. Therefore, we took a walk around the campus of St. Francis Church. Most of the folks who made up the community around St. Francis were homeless campers. They came to St. Francis mainly because there was a dining hall that served dinner each day for the community of St. Francis. However, many of them also felt St. Francis was a place where they were accepted for who they were and not judged by their appearance.

"...a place where they were accepted for who they were and not judged by their appearance"

Watching Rob interact with everyone around the campus was the first of many lessons in relationship building that I learned that year. Almost everyone knew Rob and had a story or two to share with him. I noticed that Rob did not say much during these exchanges. Rather, he listened to their stories with his full attention. After a while I asked Rob about his unusual approach. His answer was similar to most of the responses he gave that year. Instead of sharing with me his reasons, he encouraged me to find out for myself by building relationships of my own.

Bad Bob was the first homeless camper I met. He had a Grizzly Adams way about him: confident and reserved at the same time. He had lived on the streets for over 15 years and introduced me to dumpster diving and scrap metal collecting. I listened to his stories about his travels on the freight trains and sleeping under bridges. After a few days, Bob introduced me to the others who shared the campsite with him. Gloria, Bud, George, Quiet Joe and Tumbleweed all had fascinating stories of their own. They asked Rob what I was doing at JOIN and he told them I was "volunteering my time." Of course, their next question was what law did I break that required this type of community service. What surprised me was how open folks were and how many stories they shared with me. I remember sitting at the dining hall one afternoon listening to George, who seldom shared his thoughts with anyone, talk about his past as a teacher. In the middle of his story, he stopped and said,

"You're different."

'Should I take that as a compliment?' I asked.

"You're different because you're smarter than most. You don't spend all your time running your mouth. You listen, which means you're learning."

What George did not share with me that day was that he had tuberculosis. He died shortly after that conversation.

"The simple gesture of taking the time to listen to their stories helped me create lasting relationships..."

Looking back on my first day at JOIN, Rob could have told me that listening was important in building relationships. However, I think he wanted me to hear that advice from those I was working with at St. Francis. Time and again, folks told me that the most dehumanizing thing about being homeless was the fact that people ignored them. The simple gesture of taking the time to listen to their stories helped me create lasting relationships with most of the homeless persons I met that year. I still see some of the folks on my bike ride to work each day. They are still full of stories, and I still try to take the time to listen. +

Reflection Questions for Bill's Article:

1. In order to better understand the homeless folks, Bill visited where they lived on the streets and under the bridges, and listened to their stories. What are the differences in the culture and environment that you have had to "pass over" into as a volunteer? In what ways are you still considered an "outsider" in your neighborhood?

2. The St. Francis campers felt dehumanized when people ignored them. How can you make an effort to acknowledge the humanity of those around you and those you pass on the streets? How can you improve your listening skills in order to truly be present to others? Make a list of three people to whom you would like to reach out. Next to each person write ways to get started.

3. As a volunteer, what counsel have you received and from whom? Keep a journal of advice, words of wisdom or quotes from your volunteer experience to reflect on later.

"Hope is our daily bread... [it] feeds the soul and breeds the courage to continue in the face of poverty, disease, unemployment and starvation."

From *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat.

Keeping the Easter Spirit Alive

Lent is only 40 days, but the Easter season lasts 50 days-- until Pentecost! The Easter season, with its sense of hope and joy, can become central to your spirituality. What are some ways you and your community can live in the spirit of Easter, even after Easter Sunday?

Here are some of our suggestions:

1. Keep the Easter Egg Hunt going. Hunt for more than Easter eggs-- and do so regularly! Eggs are a symbol of new life, rebirth and hope. Be on the lookout for hidden blessings in unexpected places.

2. Look around you for life's "Passovers." Raise your awareness of human redemption and people overcoming suffering. What can your role be?

3. Find new ways to celebrate and seek JOY in your life. (Col. 3:1-4) Share these with a friend.

4. Try to recognize Christ on your daily journey, the way the disciples encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-35) This encounter changed the disciples! Allow Christ to change you by taking the time to listen, being present and breaking bread with those on your journey.

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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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