



A former volunteers' guide to living  
through times of transition.

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Dear Volunteer or Lay Missioner,

Sadness...excitement...confusion...relief...anxiety...accomplishment...grief... If any (or all!) of these emotions express how you are feeling as you wrap up your term of service, please know that you are not alone! Full-time service often leaves a lifelong imprint on those who volunteer, and sometimes it takes years of reflection and prayer for the impact to be fully understood. This is an important time to both look back on what you've experienced and look ahead to what is next. We are here to support you on this journey.

The What's Next Notebook is a resource that will guide you through the process of looking back, saying goodbye, determining your next steps, and sustaining your spiritual growth. In this book you will find resources and reflection materials that will help you in the transition.

Thank you for all that you have done in service to the poor and our Church. You are in our prayers during this exciting and important time of transition, and we look forward to whatever new path lays ahead of you.

- Catholic Volunteer Network and Catholic Apostolate Center

### **How to Use the What's Next Notebook?**

This resource is intended to serve many purposes. We hope to share some wisdom and encouragement as you begin this time of transition. Through prayers, reflections, practical tips, and advice from other volunteer alumni, you will find the tools you need to take the next steps in life. We also hope that within these pages you will find some space to unpack your rich experience as a volunteer or lay missioner. Spend some time with this notebook, jot down your thoughts in its pages, and come back to it as you continue down the path that God has called you to.











*Perhaps the most difficult part of completing your year of service is the process of saying goodbye to the community you have built. However, your goodbyes are an important step in the transition process. Taking time to say goodbye will help you feel a sense of closure and enable you to move on.*

## The Three Phases of Transition

Leaving a volunteer placement and community is a major transition. William Bridges, a renowned transitions expert, presents a framework for understanding transition that may be helpful to you. He makes an important distinction between change and transition – change occurs outside of us, e.g., leaving a volunteer community or starting a new job, and transition is the internal adjustment we make as change occurs. Each change we experience must be accompanied by a transition in how we think and feel about ourselves, others, our priorities, and actions. In the following section, we present Bridges’ ideas about the three phases of transition, and suggest skills you may find helpful in making the transition from volunteering. As you read through the different stages, identify the stage you are currently experiencing. Highlight the suggestions that speak to you the most. Revisit these pages over time to reflect on the ways your perspectives have changed.

### BRIDGES’ THREE PHASES OF TRANSITION

**PHASE ONE:**  
**Letting Go**

**PHASE TWO:**  
**The Neutral Zone**

**PHASE THREE:**  
**New Beginning**

#### Phase One: Letting Go

*A transition begins when we acknowledge a loss and let go of a past identity. To successfully transition, we need to deal adequately with endings, with their consequences, and with the risk of letting go.*

##### What’s at Risk?

Failure to let go could....

- Lead to a subsequent disabling, chronic, or unexplained sense of loss.
- Foster the development of unhealthy attachment to living in the past.
- Delay consideration of new possibilities.

##### What’s Possible?

Letting go....

- Allows us to better handle the grief caused by loss/change.
- Helps us, following a loss, to face the uncertainty of the Neutral Zone.
- Gives us a chance to grow in new ways.
- Allows us to more aptly consider new possibilities in the Neutral Zone.

##### Suggestions for Letting Go:

- Develop a clear picture of what is actually going to change.
- Be honest about what you are really losing, including losses that are obscured by the obvious loss.
- Allow yourself time to grieve.
- Discern ways to compensate for the loss.
- Define clearly what’s over and what’s not.
- Mark or celebrate the ending.
- Honor the past rather than denigrate it.
- Give yourself a piece of the past to carry forward.
- Be open to new understandings and values connected with the new beginning to which you are transitioning.



## Phase Two: The Neutral Zone

*This is the time when the old way is gone, but our new identity is not yet clear. Marvelous growth is possible in this phase.*

### What's at Risk?

During this time...

- Old weaknesses can re-emerge.
- We can become stagnant in self-doubt.
- Instead of pursuing new possibilities productively, we may expend our energy by simply coping.

### What's Possible?

This is a time when...

- Through creativity, we can experience breakthroughs, rather than breakdowns.
- We can break out of the false belief that whatever is, is right.
- Discovery, innovation, and personal enhancement are most possible.

### Suggestions for the Neutral Zone:

- Recognize the journey from one identity to another is hard and takes time.
- Expect ambiguity and confusion.
- Resist premature closure on a decision.
- Understand that this is a time of enormous change that needs to be managed.
- Ask questions; seek new solutions and new identities.
- Be creative; explore new and unusual ways of getting things done. Use both sides of the brain; shift perspectives.
- Re-define/Re-orient yourself: use the uncertainties of the Neutral Zone as opportunities for creative growth.
- Give yourself realistic, short-term objectives; keep track of good ideas.
- Embrace setbacks and losses as entry points for new solutions.

## Phase Three: New Beginning

*This final phase starts when we commit to new values and attitudes, and to a new identity. The new beginning is when we have made the interior conversations and convincingly see ourselves in a new role, relationship, or situation.*

### What's at Risk?

New beginnings can...

- Reactivate old anxieties associated with an ending of the old way.
- Trigger memories of past failures and their associated loss of self-esteem.
- Frighten us because they call for a new commitment.

### What's Possible?

We can experience...

- A strong sense of confidence that we know who we are.
- A celebration of having made a successful transition.
- A sense of well-being with where we are in our lives and where we are going.

### Suggestions for a New Beginning:

- Recognize that, while the start of an external change follows the timing of a preset schedule, beginnings follow the timing of the mind and heart.
- Stay focused. Keep in mind the purpose of your transition. Think about the ways the start of the external change is different from the beginning of your new identity.
- Give yourself quick successes, even if small, for they are affirming.
- Create a mental picture of the new beginning; use symbols of the new identity to reinforce it.
- Celebrate the successful beginning at the end of a transition. Reward yourself for having accomplished the transition. Have fun!



*“Where we love is home - home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.” - Oliver Wendell Holmes*

*“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” - Robert Frost*

*“Where thou art, that is home.” - Emily Dickinson*

*“There’s no place like home.” - L. Frank Baum*

*“Your true home is in the here and now.” - Thich Nhat Hanh*

After your year of service the word “home” probably has a new meaning for you. Whereas home was once a specific place, it now is an experience of being unconditionally loved and accepted. You are returning to your friends and family as a changed person, hopefully a better version of the person you were before. It may be challenging to ease back into life, but take comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Many volunteers have gone through this same transition before you. Here are some tips to make the transition a bit easier.

**Slow down.** After volunteering for a year or more, you may feel additional pressure to figure out your next steps as soon as possible. With student loans and other financial obligations pending, it is likely that you will be anxious to move forward. Take a deep breath and remember to give yourself the time you need to make decisions with a clear mind.

**Make space for prayer.** One challenge of coming home is to avoid getting caught in the fast-paced, daily grind that so many people find themselves stuck in. Be intentional about prioritizing time for prayer and reflection during this period of transition. This quiet time will keep you centered and focused as you discern your next steps.

**Be patient with your family.** They probably haven’t undergone the same personal journey—and may not be used to the new you! It will take some time for them to understand your new perspectives and priorities.

**Keep your language skills sharp.** Many missionaries who serve internationally are able to learn a new language during their time abroad. After a year or two of getting used to this new language, it may seem an abrupt change to go back to speaking English all the time. You will find plenty of opportunities to volunteer your language skills listed on Idealist.org.

**Get cooking.** A good meal with friends or family goes a long way to rekindle relationships and can be a great opportunity to share stories about your time of service. You probably learned a new recipe or two while serving, so why not share your culinary expertise with your friends and family at home!



*A Prayer:*

*Loving God, I offer up this prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of home. Thank you for creating for me the places where I can return to experience unconditional love and acceptance. Where I can be my true self. As I make this transition, I pray that I will always remember the care and hospitality extended to me. And grant me a generous heart that prompts me to open my home to those I meet along the journey.*

## Telling Your Story

“How was it?” It won’t take long for you to hear this question after you return home. It is difficult to know how to summarize such a complex and life changing experience in only a few sentences. Most people will not have the patience to listen to your full story, so how can you respond to this question?

**Connect with someone who speaks your language.** Do you have a friend or acquaintance who has a volunteer or mission experience also? It might be helpful to meet with them soon after your arrival home. They will probably make more time to listen to your stories than others who cannot relate. You will find it therapeutic to “get it all out” and after that experience, you will find it easier to share your story in a more concise way.

**Say ‘Yes!’ to speaking engagements!** You may be asked to share about your experience by your parish, your alma mater, or even your volunteer program. Although it may seem daunting, the chance to speak to a captive audience, with time to prepare your talking points, is a great opportunity to continue the work you began during your year of service. If you are unsure of where to start, here are some suggestions that may be helpful depending on your audience:

- **Preparation is key.** Considering how well you know your own stories, you may feel inclined to wing it rather than prepare your talk, but we encourage you to spend some time thinking through your talk in advance. It is easy to get carried away with story after story and you may lose your audience in the process. Jotting down a simple outline will help you stay on track, but also speak naturally.
- **Introduction.** Give your name and where you are from, what program you volunteered with and where you have served. Briefly describe what you did there. Tip: Many times as volunteers we get engaged in a number of different ministries – don’t waste too much time in the introduction describing all of them. Instead, focus on one or two that were most significant to you, and to this talk.
- **Use stories to illustrate your ministry.** Rather than talking about the people you served in a broad terms, focus in on one or two stories that really explain what your service was all about. Tip: use first names whenever possible—this will naturally make your story more memorable.
- **Describe the unique culture of the community you served.** But, it is important to not dwell too much on the differences in culture, instead place great emphasis on the similarities you discovered. This will help the audience identify with the community you are describing.
- **If you were to capsule the experience in an image, scriptural passage, poetry, or metaphor – what would that be?** Tip: try to choose something snappy and memorable – give the listeners something that will stick with them.
- **Now that you’ve got their interest, be sure to let them know how they can get involved.** Share some suggestions of ways they can partake in that ministry, or find a volunteer program to serve with. Don’t forget to mention Catholic Volunteer Network as a resource for those that would like to serve!

**It’s never too late!** Your service experience will stay with you for the rest of your life. There is no reason to stop talking about it after a year or two has passed. As time goes by, you will find that your stories change and take on new meaning. Audiences will be interested in hearing not only what the experience was like, but also how it changed you. Speaking engagements are great opportunities for ongoing reflection and integration.

*“I must tell my story if it is to become my story. In the telling of my experiences through the images and words related to those experiences I begin to own the experiences and allow them to shape me. In the telling of my story I appropriate the person I am becoming as a result of that story.”*

*- John Welch, O. Carmelite*



*“Our only desire and our one choice should be this:  
I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”  
- Saint Ignatius of Loyola*

No matter where you are in the process of deciding what’s next, the tools of discernment will help you make your decisions with confidence.

It’s easy to understand that God’s will for our lives is to make choices that position us to utilize our gifts, grow emotionally and spiritually, and serve others. But what happens when we have several good options to choose from, when the choice is not a matter of deciding between right and wrong, but rather choosing between different paths that appear equally important and fulfilling? Saint Ignatius of Loyola spent a lot of time asking himself this same question, and the conclusions he came to are still helpful to us today, five hundred years later.

Discernment is simply defined as making choices in the context of faith. It is a way of sorting through all the noise, pressure, and confusion in your life to hear God’s voice. It’s never a one-time decision; it is a manner of living. Pay attention to the process, there is much you can learn about yourself and God through it.

Ignatian discernment is built on the key premise that God is not distant, but instead present in our lives and highly interested in the decisions we make. This practice is meant for those who already have an established faith and wish to grow in it. Rather than pushing our feelings aside to make decisions purely based on facts and logic, discernment encourages us to tune in to our feelings and see how they are guiding us. Saint Ignatius created a habit of looking at his options and paying attention to his emotions whenever he had an important decision to make. He soon discovered that as long as he was in a healthy place, spiritually, his gut feelings were pretty accurate. He felt peace about the right decisions (consolation) and a sense of discomfort about the wrong ones (desolation). This, he determined, was God’s spirit within him.

#### Tips for Discernment:

- Give yourself time. You will not be able to discern properly when you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, fear, or desperation. Similarly, try as best you can to set your own time frame for making decisions and do not allow outside influences to pressure you into making a decision before you feel ready.
- Share about your decision with a trusted friend. It may be more comfortable to keep things inside until you’ve made a decision, but talking it over with a friend will often bring a sense of reassurance and clarity.
- Seek silence. In a fast-paced and noisy world, it may be difficult to slow down and hear the quiet voice of God within you. Be intentional about making time and space for quiet reflection on a regular basis. You may find it helpful to arrive at Mass a half hour early and spend that time in prayer, or take a long walk in a secluded park to experience God in nature. Just be sure to leave your ipod and cell phone at home.

#### Helpful Resources:

- Catholic Apostolate Center has collected a number of helpful vocational discernment resources on their website. Check them out at: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html)
- “What’s Your Decision? How to Make Choices with Confidence and Clarity” by J. Michael Sparough, SJ, Jim Manney, and Tim Hipskind, SJ, Loyola Press, 2010.
- “Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality” by Margaret Silf, Loyola Press, 1999.

*“We will discover that we find our deepest desire not in our arriving,  
but in our journeying; not in the finding, but in the searching.”  
- Margaret Silf*



## Working in the For-Profit Business World

As a returning volunteer, you might have some questions about entering the profit-making arena. You may even wonder if it is possible to live out a commitment to social justice in the fast-paced, upwardly-mobile, competitive world of business. The answer, of course, is "Yes!" Such a commitment is possible for anyone in business. One way to live out your commitment is to do plenty of research on the company before you apply for a job with them. If it is a multi-national, does it respond in a responsible way to the needs and conditions of workers in developing countries? How responsible is its use of resources, both human and natural? What are its hiring processes? Does it have a commitment to racial justice and make accommodations to persons with disabilities? Does it encourage employees to contribute to their community? Does it make contributions itself? The business world is very much in need of persons for whom these values are important. The Christian commitment you bring to your work will have just as much effect as if you were working in the nonprofit sector or the Church. Only you can know where God is calling you to live out your vocation.

## Job Hunting

Now that you've spent some time discerning your career path, it's time to start the hunt for a great job!

### Where to start?

Take some time to remember the factors that were important to you when choosing your volunteer program. Were you drawn to a particular location? Was it a specific type of service that interested you? Did the opportunity to live within a new culture draw you in? Were you inspired by the charisma of the program? You probably did not choose your program based on one factor alone, but there may have been one guiding interest that helped you get started down the path towards finding the right program. Similarly, many of those same factors can help you narrow down your options in your job search. When you think about your future job, what are the elements that are most important to you? The answer to this question becomes the key words you use when searching the internet for jobs.

### Tips for Resumes that Get Noticed

It has been said that employers spend less than thirty seconds screening each resume they receive. Therefore, it is essential to have a resume that is well-formatted and clearly showcases your qualifications. The following tips will help ensure your resume passes the test:

- Display name and contact information clearly at the top of the resume. Be sure to list your professional email address, not your school or work address, so that you don't run the risk of having an account closed on you before you hear back from an employer. Also, keep it simple when it comes to email addresses. It is best if your address is some form of your name, rather than nicknames, attributes, or hobbies.
- Start with the most important information – it is okay to have a two-page resume if you cannot include all your important experiences and accomplishments on one page, but be sure to keep your greatest accomplishments towards the top of the first page. In most cases, three pages is too much information for a resume.
- Use reverse chronological order throughout – always start with your most recent positions and follow with older positions.
- Clearly designate sections for work, education, and other skills. This helps employers find the information they are looking for very quickly.
- When emailing your resume, send it in PDF format. This will ensure that your fonts and formatting will display properly on the employers computer.
- Get a second opinion – after spending so much time perfecting your resume, there still may be

Don't forget to register for Catholic Volunteer Network's weekly alumni job bank featuring job opportunities all across the United States!

Visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni) to subscribe!

some errors or typos that you miss. Having someone who knows you well reviewing your resume helps ensure that you are presenting yourself accurately. You may also consider contacting your college Career Services office because they are often able to extend their assistance to alums as well as current students.

- Don't leave out AmeriCorps! If you served as an AmeriCorps member, this is a great asset to include in your resume. Even employers who have not heard of your volunteer program will likely recognize AmeriCorps and understand what your experience was like.

### How should I showcase my volunteer experience on my resume?

Your service can actually appear in a few different places on your resume. You should definitely include your service placement under employment, since you served in a long-term, full-time capacity. You can describe the other components of your program, such as community living, social justice, and prayer under "Volunteer Experience" or "Related Experience." Your cover letter is another good opportunity to discuss your rich volunteer experience in more depth. We can guarantee that employers will be interested in hearing more about this unique experience!

### What is a CV?

A Curriculum Vitae, or CV, is similar to a resume in many ways, but it puts more emphasis on academic achievements, including special projects, publications, honors and awards. These are often used when applying for positions in education or research. Generally, CVs are longer and more thorough than resumes.

## Applying to Graduate School

Every year approximately 15 percent of full-time volunteers go on to attend graduate school. The process of applying for graduate school can be time consuming, so it is recommended that you begin the process about a year and a half before your intended start date. Keep in mind that most application deadlines are between December and March.

Catholic Volunteer Network keeps an updated list of graduate programs that offer special scholarships and assistantships for former volunteers. Visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/academic-programs](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/academic-programs) for more information about these academic opportunities.

### Step One: Research

What do you want to study? What type of degree or certification are you seeking? What school would you like to attend? Are you looking for a traditional classroom experience or do you prefer an online program? These are all big questions that require much thought and prayer. Take some time to consider all your options before moving forward.

### Step Two: Put your vision into words

You've probably heard it said "Master's degrees are the new Bachelor's," which suggests that Master's degrees are now the standard level of education required to be competitive in the job market. Everyone is doing it, and you may feel that you need to also just to keep up. However, grad school is a costly undertaking - both in time and money. It's important you are pursuing the right degree for the right reasons. Take some time to think through your motives and practice verbalizing why you want to go to grad school. When you are able to easily summarize your career ambitions, you will have an easier time taking the next steps. And now that you are able to talk about it, talk about it! Mention your plans to friends and colleagues in the field to see if they have advice or connections that will help you get into the best academic programs.

### Step Three: Secure all admission requirements

Every grad school has different requirements, so be sure to have a grasp on the demands of the schools you are applying to. Identify the number and types of references needed, and begin to think of which individuals you would like to utilize. You can even reach out to your references at this early stage to let them know about your plans and seek their advice. Additionally, most schools require applicants to take certain standardized tests before applying. It is best to do

this approximately three months before you intend to submit your application. The following are the most commonly required tests:

- GRE (Graduate Record Examination, [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)) – often required for degrees in Arts & Sciences, Engineering, Nursing, etc.
- GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test, [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com)) – often required for degrees in Business and Management.
- MAT (Miller Analogy Test, [www.milleranalogies.com](http://www.milleranalogies.com)) – accepted by some Social Science and Humanities programs.
- LSAT (Law School Admissions Test, [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)) – required for admission to Law School.
- MCAT (Medical College Admission Test, [www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat)) – required for admission to Medical School.

### Step Four: Submit applications

It is important to carefully follow each school's specific application instructions, as universities often have unique requirements. Be sure to take note of deadlines and give yourself plenty of time to submit all materials on time. Enlist the help of a couple trusted friends to proofread your application and personal statement - you might be amazed by the typos that your eyes can fail to catch after so many revisions. As much as possible, send all of your documents at one time, converting files into PDFs to ensure that they are kept in a readable format. Finally, don't forget to scan documents and keep a backup file of everything you submit and follow up with the school to make sure that your application has been received.

*“Discovering my vocation does not mean scrambling towards some prize just beyond my reach, but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice out there calling me to something I am not. It comes from a voice in here calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given to me at birth by God.” - Thomas Merton*

## Religious Vocations

Some people go into volunteer ministry thinking that it will be a first, experimental step toward a religious vocation or the diocesan priesthood. Others, who originally had no such intentions, leave realizing the same thing.

There are many structures set up to assist you in finding out if a religious vocation or the diocesan priesthood is for you. Your most basic resource is your diocesan Vocations Office, or the diocese that you may be interested in serving in. Your Vocations Office has all the resources you need to be in touch with religious communities outside the diocese as well. Vocations Offices may host meetings for men and women discerning their vocation.

Every religious community has a Director of Vocations. If you know which community you are interested in, this is the person to be in touch with. Any member of the community can give you this individual's name and contact information. Vocation Directors are just as interested as you are in discerning which life God is calling you to – no matter what that life is.

There are several websites that provide information on vocations and listening to your calling. The National Religious Vocation Network produces the annual guide, *Vision*. Visit their website [www.vocationnetwork.org](http://www.vocationnetwork.org) in order to see the latest edition. Catholics on Call seeks to support young adults in discerning their call to lay and ordained service to the Church. Visit their website for resources and more information [www.catholicsoncall.org](http://www.catholicsoncall.org). The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also has a section of their website dedicated to vocations: [www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations).

Looking for more information about vocations? Be sure to check out the wealth of resources compiled by Catholic Apostolate Center available at:  
[www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html)





*How can you move on, without leaving all that you gained from your service experience behind? Many of the values and practices you appreciated about your year of service can be sustained, it just requires some additional effort.*

Kayla is a former lay missionary who worked overseas as a teacher and now works in international development. Joe's experience as a full-time volunteer at a homeless shelter fostered a call to serve God in religious life. Mary decided to take a year off between undergrad and graduate school to work in a day program for disabled adults and now finds her vocation by serving the community as a social worker. All of these people engaged in volunteer service for a year or more, and all found a way to incorporate that experience into the next phase of their professional lives. Returning from service is often a confusing time because an old way of seeing has been replaced with a new way.

While transitioning is not an option, transitioning in a healthy, productive manner is a choice. Sometimes former volunteers, after a year or two has passed, think of it as a box sitting on a shelf in the closet. The experience happened, they learned from it, but now they are doing the next thing. It is essential to understand that you have changed, and that change is a good thing. But you don't have to let your experience isolate you from the outside world.



*A Prayer:  
I thank you, loving God, for the ways I have been transformed by service. I pray that I will remember your faithfulness and grace as I take my next steps. Help me to cling to these experiences as I continue this journey, growing in love and faith every step along the way.*

## Community

In many ways you have been living a "countercultural lifestyle" as a volunteer. Many of the practices you have adopted are as a result of your community living experience. It may be that you are interested in continuing this experiment in Christian living. How can you go about this?

*"One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing."*

*- Jean Vanier, Community And Growth*

## Keeping in Touch

This may seem obvious, but it is helpful in the transition if you remain in touch with your volunteer community and support one another in the journey. You are all walking away from your service year having been changed in profound and unique ways. Most people will not understand this experience, but your community will! Take comfort in knowing that you do not have to go through the transition alone. Here are a few ways that you can stay connected to your volunteer community:

**Commit to a common prayer time.** While living in community, you may have become accustomed to praying for one another's needs regularly. You can maintain this practice, even if you are not in the same place. Throughout the week, share your prayer requests with one another via email. Then, choose a day of the week and carve out 15 minutes to pray for those intentions. It's a powerful feeling to know there are people praying along with you all over the country.

**Share resources.** When you come across an article or podcast that reminds you of your community, or one of the issues you confronted during your service experience, send it along. Although we live in a media-saturated culture, it is helpful to share the particularly important pieces with those who will appreciate them most.

**Hangout.** Facetime, Skype, and Google Hangouts make it possible for you to easily connect in a natural and casual way. You can even replicate your own community meals by sitting down together for a Hangout during dinner time once a month.

**Connect with other volunteers in your area.** Catholic Volunteer Network hosts regional listservs for former volunteers. This resource can help you make new friends with people who've served in other volunteer programs. To sign up, please visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration).

## Intentional Community

Faithful adults, young and old, single and married – sometimes even with children – are living in small Christian communities all across the world. This may be something that you are interested in, too. Community living is a challenge both to establish and to maintain, but the results may be just what you are looking for. Often you can find other people who are interested in this lifestyle among other volunteer alumni in your community. Once you have found a group, you need to make some crucial decisions together regarding expectations and ground rules. Although misunderstandings will still arise, discussing some issues beforehand could make things much easier in the long term. Topics worth discussing include:

- Division of household tasks
- Common meals
- Shared prayer
- Affiliation with some local religious community
- Expectations of fellowship/community time
- Communication and conflict resolution skills
- Guests and welcoming new members
- Finances

It is easy to assume that this new living experience will be just like your service year, but it is important to keep in mind that every community is different. Remember to take into account that there were some issues your volunteer community did not have to face because they were handled for you by the staff of your volunteer program. Think about how you might handle these issues in a community that does not have a program director. Try to approach this new setup with an open mind and expect this new community to have some different dynamics.

You also may come across a pre-existing community that you would like to join. Before you commit to the community, carefully consider how you feel about their lifestyle and practices. Take some time to interview your community at least as carefully as you would a new job. You can discover intentional communities in your area at [www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org). One such community that may exist in your town is a Catholic Worker community. Founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker movement has loosely affiliated communities across the country who are committed to service to the poor and the struggle for social justice. For more information, visit [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org).

## Get to know your new neighbors!

Your new neighborhood may look quite different from the one you lived in during your service year, but there are still plenty of opportunities to make it feel like home. Becoming involved and invested in your new community will help fill the void you may be feeling. Find out if your community has a listserv for residents. This can be a great way to stay

up-to-date on local events, get involved in volunteer opportunities, and stay abreast of current issues affecting your neighborhood.

**Don't forget to say hello!** When you move into a new place, don't hesitate to introduce yourself to your neighbors right away. This seems like common sense, but it's actually something that very few people do!

## Living Simply

Living in intentional community and earning a small stipend definitely lend themselves to the practices of living simply. How can you maintain this lifestyle while earning a salary and living on your own? The good news is that there are plenty of ways to live simply outside of the volunteer experience. Here are a few suggestions:

**Practice Being Present.** One of the biggest challenges in living simply is learning to be fully present in the moment. We constantly have so many sources vying for our attention that it can be difficult to stay focused on what you are doing and who you are with. Practice being present by intentionally disconnecting from your phone and social media when you are in the company of others. When you are out for a walk, try to refrain from listening to music and instead focus on the sights and sounds all around you. This conscious unplugging will help you see the presence of God all around you.

**Buy Local.** Farmers markets and co-ops are not only a great way to develop a healthy, sustainable diet, they are also a great way to support the local economy and get to know your neighbors.

**Care for Creation.** The Church teaches that every part of the earth is good because it is a symbol of God's constant presence and abiding love for us. Our duty as Christians is to be good stewards of these resources. Recycling, composting, and reducing energy consumption are all ways that you can take better care of the planet.

**Hop on the bus.** According to the EPA, transportation consumes over 28 percent of the energy consumed in the U.S., with personal vehicles claiming about 60 percent of the total energy consumption. Using public transportation helps you to reduce your carbon footprint, while also helping you get to know your city and neighbors in unique ways.

**You can't do it alone.** Simple living is based on the principle of inter-dependence. It recognizes that what we do has a great impact on those around us and generations to come. Seek out like-minded people who will support you in this effort to live more simply.

## Helpful Resources

"Catholics Going Green," by Walter E. Grazer, Ave Maria Press, 2009, is a guide for small groups on living out environmental justice. This booklet contains reflections on Catholic Social Teaching, discussion questions, and prayers.

Local Harvest is an organization that helps people find farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in their area. Visit [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org) for more information.

Franciscan Action Network ([www.franciscanaction.org](http://www.franciscanaction.org)) provides resources based on St. Francis' teachings of care for creation and solidarity with the poor.

Additional resources to support your journey towards simple living can be found on Catholic Apostolate Center's Prayer and Catechesis resources page: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/prayer--catechesis.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/prayer--catechesis.html)

*"The whole universe is God's dwelling. Earth, a very small, uniquely blessed corner of that universe, gifted with unique natural blessings, is humanity's home, and humans are never so much at home as when God dwells with them."*

*- Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching,  
U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, 1991*

## Spirituality

One reason people often cite for becoming volunteers is to grow spiritually. The volunteer experience is in many ways uniquely suited to such growth. After the growth you experienced as a volunteer, you may be wondering how you can continue to have access to opportunities for such experiences once you return from your volunteer commitment. Consider the following suggestions:

- Become involved in workshops and retreats offered in your area. Find out if there are retreat houses in your area and get on their mailing lists. Diocesan newspapers and parish bulletins often include information about upcoming events. Universities often have speakers and events that are open to the public.
- Find out if your diocese offers services for lay formation. JustFaith is a parish-based formation program that gives participants the opportunity to study, explore, and experience Christ's call to care for the poor and vulnerable in a lively, challenging, multifaceted process in the context of a small faith community. Visit [www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org) for details.
- Get involved in a prayer group or bible study. If you can't find one within your local church, consider taking the initiative to get this started.
- Find a spiritual director. Often vocations directors or young adult ministry staff will have information on spiritual directors available in your area. This may be a priest, minister, religious, or lay person. A spiritual director must be carefully chosen: his or her style should suit yours, and she or he must be able to challenge you in such a way that helps you grow.

## The New Evangelization

Your volunteer experience may have left you in a unique place among your old friends as one of the only active church-going members. The United States Catholic Bishops have called for a new evangelization that calls each of us to grow in our faith and go forth to proclaim the Gospel. For more information about the New Evangelization, visit Catholic Apostolate Center's resources page: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/new-evangelization.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/new-evangelization.html).

## Ongoing Reflection

Your service experience does not have to remain a closed chapter in your life, instead it can be a lens through which you see the world. Take a moment to think about how much your faith has grown during your time of service. The exercise below will help you begin that reflection process.

### Fill in the following sentences:

I felt God's presence when \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ helped me feel truly at home.

I found joy in \_\_\_\_\_.

I feel called to be an advocate for \_\_\_\_\_.

Service has made me more \_\_\_\_\_ than I was before.

Service has made me less \_\_\_\_\_ than I was before.

\_\_\_\_\_ helped me learn how to love more deeply.

One thing I hope to always remember \_\_\_\_\_.

Remembering \_\_\_\_\_ gives me strength.

Do any of your answers surprise you? Are they different than the answers you would have given before you were a volunteer? Even though your year of service has ended, prayer and contemplation are ways to keep the experience alive in your heart. You may be amazed to find the ways that God continues to speak to you. Carving out regular time for prayer will help you integrate your service experience with whatever steps you take next.

## Journaling

Journaling is an excellent way to dig deeper into the service experience. Here are some tips for cultivating the habit of journaling:

- **You don't have to have all the answers.** Your journal can be a great place to work out your struggles. You don't have to wait until you've figured it all out to document it in your journal. There is no need to edit your thoughts or feelings. Be as honest as you can. Often, the task of writing out your thoughts helps bring clarity and a sense of peace.
- **Make it a habit.** At first journaling may seem awkward or tedious, but once you've gotten the hang of it, the words will start to flow naturally. Try writing a little everyday. Soon you will be amazed by the quality of your reflections.
- **Make a list.** What are you thankful for? How has service changed you? What do you miss the most about your community? These are all great ways to start a journal entry.
- **Unplug.** Handwriting your journal entries will help you keep your thoughts unedited. The process of stepping away from your computer and picking up a pen will lend itself to deeper reflection.

## Helpful Resources

Here are some books written by volunteer alumni about their service experience:

"Mind Your Body, Work Your Soul" by Clare Strockbine, Liguori, 2013.

"Mercy in the City - How to Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, Visit the Imprisoned, and Keep Your Day Job" by Kerry Weber, Loyola Press, 2014

## Social Justice

After spending a year or more in service, social justice takes on a new meaning. The work for justice in our world is no longer about ideologies and policies, it hits much closer to home now. Poverty and injustice have a face, a story, a name. You may feel compelled to work for justice in our world on behalf of those you served. Sometimes, it is easy to know what is the most just course of action, other times, the right steps to take are not so clear. Education, reflection, and prayer are all key elements in determining where we should stand on moral issues.

Fortunately, you do not have to go through it alone, there are a number of resources available to you as you strive to promote social justice in your community.

## Catholic Social Teaching

Scripture reveals to us a God who cares for the poor and calls us to do the same. We remember that Jesus came to "to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind." (Luke 4:18-19) As we grow in faith, our commitment to the social mission of the Church to preserve the dignity of all people, should deepen as well.

Catholic Social Teaching has been articulated through a series of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents centering around these seven themes:

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's Creation

Catholic Apostolate Center hosts an excellent collection of resources on the topic of Catholic Social Teaching. Learn more at [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/catholic-social-teaching.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/catholic-social-teaching.html)

The USCCB also provides a number of resources on this topic here:  
[www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm)

*“To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!”*  
- Pope Francis

## Two Feet of Love in Action

The USCCB has developed a tool to help us integrate social justice and acts of charity into our lives. “Two Feet of Love in Action” describes two distinct, but complementary ways of living out the Gospel, based on Pope Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) and *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth).

The first foot, **Social Justice**, concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions. We step with this foot when we work to address the root causes of problems facing our communities by advocating for just public policies and helping to change the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice at home and around the world.

The second foot, **Charitable Works**, are our response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc.” We step with the Charitable Works foot when we work to aid or assist others both locally and globally to meet their immediate, short-term needs. Examples include engaging in direct service or providing food, clothing, shelter, or monetary assistance to help those in need.

To learn more about the “Two Feet” model, visit [www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/two-feet-of-love-in-action.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/two-feet-of-love-in-action.cfm). You can also check out Catholic Apostolate Center’s webinar on this topic: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/catholic-social-teaching.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/catholic-social-teaching.html)

## Additional Social Justice Resources:

- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/index.htm)
- Center of Concern Education for Justice: [www.educationforjustice.org](http://www.educationforjustice.org)
- Pax Christi USA: [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org)
- Catholic Charities USA: [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org)
- Catholic Relief Services: [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)
- Casa Juan Diego, Houston Catholic Worker: [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org)
- Church World Service: [www.cwsglobal.org](http://www.cwsglobal.org)
- Bread for the World: [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)

### A Prayer:

*God of mercy and compassion. I pray that you will use my hands to build a society that is more just, my voice to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, my feet to walk with those who walk alone. Help me to never grow comfortable in the presence of injustice. Fill me with your love and strength all the days of my life.*





We hope that the "What's Next Notebook" has been a helpful resource during this time of transition. We encourage you to stay connected to your service experience by becoming an active member of our volunteer alumni community! Here are a few resources we offer for continual support:

### Staying Connected

"Staying Connected" is our e-newsletter for volunteer alumni. We offer resources, reflections, and information about upcoming events to help you continue to integrate your service experience with your life today. Do you have a story to share? We are always looking for contributors. Let us know what you would like to write about and we will find a place to include it in an upcoming issue. Visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration) to subscribe.

### Weekly Job Bank

Looking for a job? Our job bank is a great way to find one! Every week we share about new employment opportunities all over the country. We include positions working in the areas of campus ministry, social services, volunteer programs, church ministry, and more. Please visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni-volunteer-registration](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni-volunteer-registration) to subscribe.

### Graduate School Opportunities

If you are thinking about going back to school, we have some resources you will be interested in! Our graduate school resources page provides information about programs and scholarships that are geared towards volunteer alumni. Currently, over fifteen schools offer special benefits for volunteer alumni.

Visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/academic-programs](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/academic-programs) for more information.

### Local Listservs

Our local listservs help volunteers connect with other alums living in their city. This resource is especially helpful for those who want to share about an upcoming event, have a question to ask, are looking for a roommate, or just want to make new friends. Join the listserv for alumni in your city by visiting [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/volunteer-alumni-registration).

### Attend a Discernment Retreat

We understand that it may be difficult to find the time and space for quiet reflection during this time of transition. Catholic Volunteer Network now hosts discernment retreats for current volunteers and alumni who are contemplating their next steps. Join us for a weekend retreat and enjoy the opportunity to get away from the busyness of life and join with others in the spirit of discernment. For information about upcoming retreats, visit [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/discernment-retreats](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/discernment-retreats).

### Exploring Your Vocation

Are you thinking more seriously about your vocation? You are not alone! Many people find that the year-long service experience opens their eyes to new forms of ministry and causes a stirring deep within. We would like to support you in this journey, and have several resources and discernment opportunities for you to consider. Resources can be found at: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/exploring-your-vocation](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/exploring-your-vocation) and [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/vocational-discernment-resources.html)

### Webinar Series

Catholic Volunteer Network and Catholic Apostolate Center regularly host webinars that will be of interest to volunteer alumni. Tune in to learn more about ways to strengthen your faith, grow professionally, and continue your commitment to service. More information about past and upcoming webinars can be found at: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org/alumni) and [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/webinars.html](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org/webinars.html)

## About Us:



### **Catholic Apostolate Center**

Reviving Faith • Rekindling Charity • Forming Apostles

The Catholic Apostolate Center, a ministry of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (Pallottines) - Immaculate Conception Province, was founded in 2011 to respond to the needs of the Church through: Developing, in collaboration with dioceses and other institutions and organizations, formation programs for the New Evangelization; Assisting pastoral leaders in deepening collaboration with one another; Providing formation and apostolic opportunities for members and collaborators of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. The Center takes its inspiration from the spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti and achieves its goals through hosting conferences, seminars, webinars, and presentations as well as providing online and print resources.

For more information visit: [www.catholicapostolatecenter.org](http://www.catholicapostolatecenter.org)



Catholic Volunteer Network is a national membership organization of Christian volunteer and mission programs that fosters and promotes full-time national and international service opportunities for people of all backgrounds, ages and skills. Catholic Volunteer Network supports and enhances the work of its membership by providing training and resources, networking opportunities, and national advocacy.

For more information visit: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org)