

Creative Community Nights & Continuing Volunteer Formation

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Workshop Description

- Volunteer formation doesn't have to be limited to orientation and retreat times. Weekly community nights provide an ideal opportunity to help volunteers grow and deepen in their understanding of program values. Inviting local speakers to enjoy community night with volunteers enriches the volunteer experience and promotes wide spread support of the volunteer program. Speakers can be drawn from a variety of places and engage volunteers on topics connecting to program values. Get ideas for building a formation program that teaches volunteers how to seamlessly incorporate program values into their daily lives...during their year of service and beyond!



Introductions

- Name, program/organization
- Why did you pick this session?
- What are you hoping to learn?



What We'll Cover

- Information about our program
- Overview of some of our community nights
- Video from current volunteers about their community nights
- Walk through a community night together
- Brainstorming/Workshop time



Vincentian Mission Corps

- Vincentian program sponsored by the Daughters of Charity
- Located in St. Louis
- Small communities of three to seven volunteers
- Part of the MISEVI community of Vincentian volunteer programs
- Measure of success: have you built relationships with people living in poverty? Have you been personally transformed?



Community Night Structure

- Each Monday evening, volunteers participate in a Community Night. The evening begins with prayer, followed by dinner and a session on a particular topic. These evenings center around five basic themes:
 - Community
 - Prayer/Reflection
 - Vincentian Spirituality
 - Faith
 - Social Justice
- Our community nights are planned by the director, who is on site and attends each community night
- For larger programs, this model can be adapted so a local coordinator plans or assists volunteers in putting together the community night schedule



Why is this important?

- While retreats and orientation are a great way to form your volunteers, there is a lot of time in between these special events! We want formation to be a weekly event.
- Our goal for all of our programs is to help our volunteers live out the program values for the rest of their lives; we want our volunteers to be forces of change in our community. To do that, we need to be teaching them how to incorporate program values into their lives habitually, not just during special events.





Community Nights



Community

- (How can we help them learn about community?)
- Community and Covenant: What is Covenant? Writing the VMC Covenant
- Self-Care in community
- Mid-year Reflection: Where have we been as a community? Where do we want to go?
- Simple Living: What Is It and How Do We Do It?
- Strengthsquest/Enneagram/Love Languages/Myers Briggs



Prayer/Reflection

- (What can we teach them about different forms of prayer?)
- Exploring Spirituality through Painting
- Taize Prayer
- Advent and Lenten Reflections
- Apostolic Reflection/Theological Reflection
- Praying in the Spirit of St. Vincent DePaul
- Volunteer-planned Weekly Prayer/Reflection Sessions



Vincentian Spirituality

- (What does it mean to be a Vincentian?)
- The Historical Vincent and Louise
- The Vincentian Questions and Virtues
- Serving the Poor in the Spirit of St. Vincent DePaul
- Systemic Change
- Living the Vincentian Charism as a Lay Person
- Vincentian Family: MISEVI and Vincentian Lay Missionaries



Growing in Faith/Theological Understanding

- (How can we help them develop their faith?)
- Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement-Karen House
- Sessions on Theology, Faith, and Belief
- Liturgy: What is Communal Prayer? Why Do We Do It?
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Sharing of Spiritual Journeys
- Foundations of Moral Theology: The Role of Conscience



Issues of Social Justice

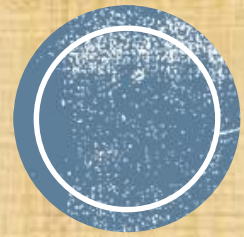
- (What can we teach them about social justice topics?)
- Justice Cafes
- Anti-Oppression & Anti-Racism Education
- Advocacy and Activism
- Access to Medical Care/Legal System for People in Poverty
- Economic Injustice and Income Inequality
- The Immigrant Experience



VMC Volunteers' Video

- Asked volunteers:
 - How would you describe community nights?
 - What have you learned from them?
 - What was your favorite community night?





Practical Tips



How do I find my speakers?

- Begin with local alums, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentians
- Then look for people at service sites, local leaders
- Ideally want someone who has expertise/experience with topic and also is able to connect with volunteers/young people
- Basic facilitation skills are key if you want the night to be beneficial for your volunteers
- This is a learning process!



Helping volunteers make the connection to their daily lives

- Can be as simple as reminding them which program value the night connects to
- Ask them at end of the night what they learned from this community night and how they will connect it to their work and community life
- Encourage regular journaling so they continue to do this work on their own
- Suggest that they bring up program values at their community business meetings (weekly or monthly)
 - Can't assume volunteers are making all the connections on their own!



Small but important details:

- Email reminders to speaker and to volunteers
- Use dinner as an ice breaker, give volunteers an opportunity to share their service experiences. Learn about speaker.
- Take a photo at end of night. Share on social media and share with speaker.
- Send simple follow up email to thank speaker.
- Have volunteers send thank you card.
- Take notes on how each community night went
- Ask for volunteer feedback!



Let volunteers plan a few!

- Every other month our volunteers plan their own community nights. This allows them to take ownership of what they want to learn and to make our program values and formation their own.
- Sometimes they just need a night to be together!



Additional benefit!

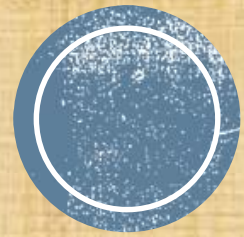
- Community nights can be used a recruitment tool!
- Invite local recruits to join you for community night
 - Great way for them to get an idea of what it would be like to participate in your program
- Share pictures of community night on your social media pages
 - Recruits can see what your program is all about



Ways we're trying to improve:

- Alum involvement
 - Have a community night where alums get to come back and share their experience
 - Have an “open door” policy a few nights a year that alums are welcome to attend
- Be more intentional about reminding volunteers which value the community night relates to





Practice Community Night



Justice Café Curriculum

- Created by Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center Justice
- Format:
 - Pretend like we've started with dinner (serves as intro and icebreaker)
 - Move from dining room to space where we'll share conversation
 - Begin with prayer or reflection
 - Dive into conversation
 - Activity, Closer Look at Addiction, Conversation Starters, Action Ideas, Closing Reflection
- Keep conversation to an hour if possible (better for attention spans and for speaker's time)





Brainstorming



Brainstorming Ideas

1. What are your program values?
 - Examples: Community, Prayer, Vincentian Spirituality, Faith, Social Justice
2. Brainstorm topics that fall under your program value categories.
3. When you think about your volunteers at the end of their year, what do you want them to have learned? What will make them a successful “VMC” volunteer or “x” volunteer?
4. Who are your local resources that could speak to your volunteers about these issues? Are there local groups you could partner with or events that your volunteers could attend on your community nights?
 - Alums, board members, service sites, sisters, priests

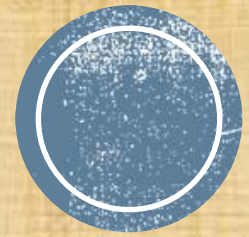


Brainstorming Ideas (cont.)

5. If you are not in the same area as your volunteers, how can you help support them in planning these types of community nights on their own?

- Start a community binder - this would include all the resources we have talked about including a list of topics, local speakers, how these connect to your program values and volunteer formation
- Begin with one or two formative community nights a month





**Other ideas or
questions?**





Thank you!

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