



## *A Year of Service, A World of Difference* *Discernment Packet*

Discernment is a thoughtful and intentional way of making decisions. In order to discern if participating in a full-time service program is what you envision doing next year, we invite you to pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings that arise as you consider life as a volunteer. This discernment packet, based on the packet used by JVC Northwest applicants, offers a summary of the four values at the core of most service programs (social justice, community, simplicity and spirituality). Please read these carefully, and use them in whatever way will be beneficial to you in your discernment, whether that's through meditation, prayer, conversation, journaling, etc. We hope you find the packet helpful in your decision making process.

The following format may help with your reflection:

- Set aside some uninterrupted time for each value. Take some time to center yourself and focus.
- Read the materials, paying attention to the feelings and thoughts that rise up in you as you reflect.
- Consider how you already live these values or desire to live these values and why.
- Share these thoughts and feelings in your journal, in a conversation, or in prayer.

Visit the CEL during your vocational discernment process:

- Schedule an appointment to meet with the Lilly Vocational Intern or Career Counselor for further conversation around service and discernment
- Utilize the CEL's electronic and book resources (located in the Modular Village) to learn more about questions to consider and programs to explore:  
<http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel/students/ftso.html>
- If you make the decision to apply, utilize the CEL's Career Connections staff to review your application materials, essays/personal statements, and résumé

**St. Olaf College – Center for Experiential Learning**  
**Career Connections      Internships      Civic Engagement**  
**Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship**  
Phone: (507) 786-3268      Fax: (507) 786-3626      [www.stolaf.edu/services/cel](http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel)

# SOCIAL JUSTICE

Volunteers work for peace and justice through service to those living on the margins of our society by addressing the root causes of social and ecological injustice, and by becoming aware of how our attitudes and behavior affect others. We understand our calling to transform attitudes and structures to eradicate poverty, create justice, and support a sustainable relationship with the earth.

*The following references and readings are provided for you to reflect more deeply on the meanings of social justice. Please choose whichever materials you feel drawn to explore.*

## **Reading:**

“Beyond Vietnam—A Time to Break the Silence” Martin Luther King, Jr.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>

“Live Free—Do It Yourself” by Sarah van Gelder and Doug Pibel

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/liberate-your-space/live-free2014do-it-yourself>

## **Quotes:**

“The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope.” –Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

“Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values your represent.” –Parker J. Palmer, *Let your Life Speak*

## **Scriptural References:**

Luke 6: 20-47 – Sermon on the Plain

Jas 2: 14-26 –Faith and Works

## **Reflection Question on Justice:**

Reflect on an experience you have had working with people who are poor or marginalized. Out of this experience, share an interaction you have had in which you recognized your own preconceived ideas about another person’s race, age, sexual orientation, gender, or socioeconomic status. What did you learn about yourself through that interaction? What did you learn about the other person? How did this experience change you and your relationship with this person?

# COMMUNITY

Some volunteer programs, like LVC and JVC, have an emphasis on intentional community; sharing a home, material resources, spirituality, recreational time, and the joys and struggles of daily life with other volunteers. Other programs will require you to find your own housing, or live as the only volunteer in a community. Whether you live with other volunteers or not, immersing yourself in the community in which you will be working and living is one of the most rewarding, and often difficult, aspects of service.

Community life in service programs is much more than living together in the same house or sharing common space with others of like interests or like mind. Life in these programs calls the individuals in each community to make a commitment to personal and social transformation. This means that conflict and discomfort are welcomed as invitations to personal and spiritual growth.

Community can provide the strength to reach out to those we serve and challenge us to be open, compassionate, and willing to change. As we practice deep compassion with ourselves and each other at home, we are strengthened for our work in the world. We affirm our relational natures and seek the sacredness at the heart of our interactions. In community we learn that our lives are interdependent, and we have a responsibility to others, as they have to us. As a volunteer it is important to demonstrate the interpersonal skills necessary for creating and sustaining a vibrant community life. When these skills are faithfully practiced, the community experience is one where you learn to engage and love the profound imperfection of being human.

*The following references and readings are provided for you to reflect more deeply on the value of community. Please choose whatever materials you feel drawn to explore.*

## **Readings:**

“A Place Called Community” by Parker Palmer

<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1143>

“The Invitation” by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

<http://www.oriamountaindreamer.com>

*Indra's Net* from the Rig Veda as described by Anne Adams

There is an endless net of threads throughout  
the universe...

At every crossing of the threads there is  
an individual.

And every individual is a crystal bead.

And every crystal bead reflects  
not only the light from every  
other crystal in the net

but also every other reflection  
throughout the entire universe.

**Quotes:**

“We are different so that we can know our need of one another, for no one is ultimately self-sufficient. A completely self-sufficient person would be sub-human.” –Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community.” -M Scott Peck

**Scriptural References:**

Matthew 18: 15-35 – Communal Life

John 13: 1-20—Washing of the Feet

**Reflection and Questions on Community:**

How do you think living in a new community will challenge you? What do you think will be exciting or fun about living in a new community? What are some needs you have regarding community that are important to you?

Please describe a situation in which you were hurt or angered by someone. How did you react? How was the situation resolved? Give an example of a time when you needed to ask someone for forgiveness. How did you feel? How was the situation resolved?

# SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is the emptying of self for the sake of personal transformation, presence to others, living in sustainable relationship with the earth, and service to marginalized members of our society. Honoring simplicity enables us to value relationships over objects, and self reflection over status. When our lives are free of an excess of activity and material possessions, our view of the world and of ourselves is clarified. We are better able to attend to our deepest self, our community, and people who are marginalized. Many programs will expect volunteers to demonstrate the ways in which their use of time, money, and resources embraces the value of simplicity. In this age of cell phone and computer overuse, we invite volunteers to be mindful of how these things distract us from the fundamental wonder and richness of life.

*The following references and readings are provided for you to reflect more deeply on the meanings of simplicity. Please choose whichever materials you feel drawn to explore.*

## **Reading:**

“A Garden of Simplicity Is Growing in the World” by Duane Elgin

[http://www.simplicityforum.org/files/Garden\\_of\\_Simplicity-1.07-Elgin-1-14-07.pdf](http://www.simplicityforum.org/files/Garden_of_Simplicity-1.07-Elgin-1-14-07.pdf)

“Peaceful Simplicity: How to Live a Life of Contentment” from Zen Habits

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/08/peaceful-simplicity-how-to-live-a-life-of-contentment>

## **Quotes:**

“The best things in life are the nearest: Breath in your nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand, the path of right just before you. Then do not grasp at the stars, but do life’s plain, common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things in life.” –Robert Louis Stevenson

“The story of the twentieth century was finding out just how big and powerful we were. And it turns out that we’re big and powerful as all get out. The story of the twenty-first century is going to be finding out if we can figure out ways to get smaller or not. To see if we can summon the will, and then the way, to make ourselves somewhat smaller, and try to fit back into this planet.” –Bill McKibben

## **Scriptural References:**

Mark 6: 6-11 – Mission of the Disciples

Luke 12: 13-34- Parable of the Rich Fool

## **Reflection Question on Simplicity:**

How does your present lifestyle reflect, or not reflect, the value of simplicity? Please refer to your use of time, money, material objects, technology, and/or travel. Push yourself to discern what is truly necessary during your year. What would factor into your decision to bring a cell phone or laptop on your year?

# SPIRITUALITY

Volunteers are encouraged to examine and act on the causes of social and environmental injustice to promote peace and structural change. Spiritual expression and reflection are important elements of this experience. Many faith-based programs accept applicants from all traditions and denominations, as well as those fully engaged in the questions of their faith. Reflecting on spirituality, whether applying to a faith-based program or not, is a crucial element of your experience as a volunteer.

*The following references and readings are provided for you to reflect more deeply on the meanings of spirituality. Please choose whichever materials you feel drawn to explore.*

## Readings:

Excerpt from “Illuminata, A Call to Prayer” by Marianne Williamson

<http://www.spiritsite.com/writing/marwil> --Please click on Part One of the Illuminata on the left side of the page.

Excerpt from “Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith” by Henri Nouwen

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=15919>

## Quotes:

“Wherever we may come alive, that is the area in which we are spiritual.” –David Steindle-Rast

“Spirituality exists wherever we struggle with the issue of how our lives fit into the greater cosmic scheme of things. This is true even when our questions never give way to specific answers or give rise to specific practices such as prayer or meditation. We encounter spiritual issues every time we wonder where the universe comes from, why we are here, or what happens when we die. We also become spiritual when we become moved by values such as beauty, love, or creativity that seem to reveal a meaning or power beyond our visible world. An idea or practice is "spiritual" when it reveals our personal desire to establish a felt-relationship with the deepest meanings or powers governing life.” –Robert C. Fuller

## Scriptural Reflections:

Mark. 12: 28-34 – The Greatest Commandment

John 9: 1-41—The Man Born Blind

**Reflection Question on Spirituality:** Share two or three key moments on your spiritual path thus far.