



Winter Break Prep Meeting #1

Supplies:

- Paper, markers
- Background music

- A. Food and Socializing! (10-15 min)**
B. Centering and Prayer (5 min)

Take a few moments of silence to pause. Emphasize centering one's self with guided breathing...inhale...exhale....

Opening Prayer: Prayer for Openness

Bring to mind the loving presence within you and around you as you pray the following:

- 1) *Touch your fingertips to your forehead, saying:* Open my mind to remember your presence.
- 2) *Touch your fingertips to your mouth, saying:* Open my mouth to speak your wisdom.
- 3) *Touch your fingertips to your heart saying:* Open your heart to extend your love.
- 4) *Hold both hands out, open, palms up, saying:* Open my hands to serve you generously.
- 5) *Holding arms wide open, saying:* Open my whole being to you.

Make a deep bow to the loving presence in you.

Icebreaker (10 min) (focus on connectedness – feel free to use any other you would like)

Six Degrees of Separation

The person who starts this game will begin by telling the group about themselves (name, major, hometown...etc). The person talks until someone else finds something they have in common with them. That person will then say their name and stand up, link arms with the first person and talk about themselves until someone has something in common with them...etc, until everyone in the group is linked.

- c. VIA** – The ways of VIA are distinct yet all interconnected. VIA a way of being. We hope with these pre-trip meetings to explore each distinct way more intentionally to understand it more fully. Within the experience will have moments of awareness, dialogue and solidarity inter-woven. (Check in with people to see how they understood VIA from the orientation.)

Vincentians in Action (VIA)...

was created by a group of students, staff, and faculty to frame theoretically our social and political practice in service and advocacy. Over the years, VIA became a framework implemented by DePaul Community Service Association (DCSA), Service Immersions, Political-Activist organizations and others.

Today, VIA is a Vincentian community that reflects on faith, service, and justice. VIA is more than a strategic way of getting into action. VIA is a way to be, to think, to relate, to celebrate, to act, to grow integrally. VIA is here to teach us, to show us the way, to find common places and points of unity to build a better world through personal, community, and social transformation. In VIA we can find wisdom, the kind of wisdom that anybody from any background can integrate as a personal value. VIA belongs to humanity.

Reflect

- ❖ What is your own understanding of VIA?
- ❖ Have you ever had an experience where you connected deeply with someone completely different from you?
- ❖ Has an experience with the poor, the marginalized, or the abandoned brought you to look beyond what is seen? If so, how?

D. The Way of Awareness/Appreciation

Introduce

1. Here is how Wiesner describes what happens to us during the Way of Awareness and Appreciation—the first transformation of VIA.
“We observe their suffering, hear their cry, study their character, actions and situation. This exposure is essential to the development of this stage of the spiritual life. This contact may be serving in a soup kitchen, visiting a hospice for the dying, a trip to some Third World country, prison ministry [walking a homeless dog, tutoring a child, painting a house, restoring a blighted ecosystem]. Whatever for it takes, it is important for us, since we so easily protect ourselves from the harsh realities of hunger and oppression, from the smell of the slums, the potential violence of the night. We can, of course, experience some of this through books, films, and the like. But there is not a substitute for immediate contact.”

2. Leader – share a story that you have had with the way of awareness

REFLECT: We must first become aware of ourselves and our roots before we can become aware of the reality in the world. One piece of who we are, is where we come from. Our theme this year is Bring Change Back Home so today we hope to reflect upon the meaning of HOME for each of us.

Spiritual Geography: Mapping the Meaning of My Life - Where is HOME for me?
(30 minutes)

- 1) **CENTERING:** Start where you are, ground ourselves in our bodies, we must first be at home with our bodies and ourselves.
 - a. Yoga: start with an intention and return to that with each breath, the goal is to do this exercise, not get to enlightenment or even to clear the head. Pay attention to how your body feels.
 - b. Reflect: How did it feel to be here now?
- 2) Now that we're each a bit more *here* let's find out who we are and also who our neighbors are:
 - a. Ask each person to answer the question: **"Where did you come from to be here today?"** (they may take it literally or more figuratively – encourage them to name the literal space they came from)
 - b. Next ask: **"Is the place you've come from a place you would label as 'home'?"**
- 3) **EXERCISE:** Before we can Bring Change Back Home we need to explore what Home means for each of us. On the piece of paper take a few minutes to express some of the places that you consider home: What is home? Where is home? Who is home? What does home feel like? Smell like? Taste like? Where do you call home? How many places? Who is home to you? Why? Is home where you live, work, study, obtain your nourishment, celebrate, where you are made to feel beautiful, where you worship, where you are held close, where you have fun?
 - a. What is one of the most homey homes for you? Where (or when, in what situation?) are you most at home in your home?
- 4) **SHARE:** Choose one story or more stories about home to share with the group. What does home MEAN to you?
 - a. As people are sharing try to take note of what they say and write it down
 - b. Share St. Vincent's ideas of home if he were in the room with you:

Dax, France, the home of his family, was Vincent's "origin" home. He was born in 1581 to into a farming family. His connection with the the people of his time who suffered from

poverty was rooted in seeing his own situation in them. This is rooted in his own home experience. When he was unable to return to Dax later in life he was even more connected to his home.

Another sense of home was Saint Lazare in Paris. It was a place he encouraged his community members to return to for refreshment, it was where he died, and it became a sign of God's providence to Vincent. Saint Lazare became a place in which his missionaries were formed so that they could go forth on mission. They could always look back on this place of home or central unity.

A third sense of "home" for Vincent would be wherever the mission led him, even if this was vicariously through his confreres. Home for Vincent as the central point of unity that drives our common mission, and it's where we find ourselves, which ideally is with those who lead us to God as we lead them to God.

****Other's might simply say since Vincent said "The poor should be our lords and masters"...home for Vincent would be with them. He told the Daughters of Charity that the streets were their convents. Home was walking to the other in the streets and encountering.**

- 5) Being at home is a way of connecting you with the experience of at-home-ness. It is important for us to know these places...we often need to return to them! It is also important to take a look and see how often we do return to these places that bring us life.
- 6) HOME IS...
 - a. List off randomly some of the different places that were named as home as the closing prayer.

Exercise: This week pay attention to all the times you name "home" and all the times you feel you are "home."

Announcements/Questions

Closing Prayer

"May the door of my inner home be wide enough to receive those who hunger for kindness, those who are lonely, or isolated from friendship.

May it welcome those who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture.

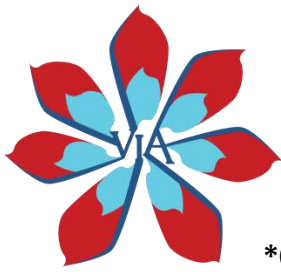
May the door of my heart be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.

May the door of my heart be closed to self-righteousness, selfishness, and harshness.

May its threshold be no stumbling block to receiving those who are different than I am.

May my inner home be for all who enter, the doorway to spiritual richness and a more meaningful life."

--The Siddur of Shir Chadash



2009 Winter Break Prep Meeting #2

The way of Dialogue and Simplicity

*Objectives:

- Continue with the way of awareness and examine more the roots of our beliefs or ideas about the community we are invited to enter.
- Introduce the idea of dialogue as asking the questions “why” and examining root causes
- Explore how we hope to live simplicity during the immersion experience. Simplicity is a way to enter more deeply into relationships which is also the way of dialogue.

A. *Food and socializing!

B. ***Ice breaker** (Depending on how your group is forming will depend on the icebreaker you use. You might do a couple of them if the group has not yet formed a safe space. Icebreakers to get them connecting in deeper ways with each other are good at this point.)

C. *Centering and Prayer

D. ***Safe space** (Revisit your safe space guidelines you have created. Be sure to have them displayed during the meeting and add to them if people want to add anything.)

E. *The Way of Dialogue (choose from the exercises below)

“We all know that the main element of Vincentian spirituality is shaped by the direct encounter with the poor. Essentially, what should happen for this encounter to be transformative for people who are engaged in direct-service? The answer is simple: a conversation, a dialogue.

In this sense, Theodore Wiesner, CM is very clear in stating that the way of dialogue leads us to a second essential transformation: by being in front of the reality (poverty) of the other we will find, as Vincent did, our own poverty. O'Donnell writes, in *Vincent de Paul: His Life and Way*, the following: In his experience with the poor, “Vincent knew both the depths of his own poverty and the graciousness of God’s mercy. This prolonged experience of anguish, desperation, and suffering raises the question: Who was the poorest person Vincent ever met? The answer that suggests itself is that he himself was. Vincent knew himself as the Poor One.”

All this happened thanks to an open, honest, and transformative dialogue with the poor.

To have an authentic Vincentian experience of service, be ready to engage in dialogue: with the people you serve, your group, your community, the community partners, and even the neighborhood where your service is located.”

E. Babble Exercise:

Tell the group we will get to know each other better through babbling. Find a partner. Who is person #1 and person #2. Person #1 I am going to give you a word and you are going to talk about that subject whatever you have to say about it for 30 seconds. Whatever you say doesn't have to be interesting, logical or even fact. Person #2 will just listen. Your word is _____ (give them a common concrete subject – flowers, sports, hair) Say stop. Person #2 has the same instructions. Do this with 2 words each. Then for the final words use service for person #1 service and justice for person #2.

Share anything you noticed about what was shared or about the exercise itself with your partner.

G. Two Feet Exercise:

- a. Everyone stand up! Stand on one foot and think of all the times that you have offered service or helped someone out. Think of all the moments that you were doing charity of some kind. When you are finished thinking about these moments you may put your foot down.
- b. Now stand on your other foot. Think of all the times that you worked towards changing a structure or system of some kind. Think of the times you advocated for someone, called your legislature or anything else you would consider working for justice. When you are finished thinking about these moments you may put your foot down.
- c. Did you notice a difference between the two? Did you feel like you wanted to fall over with all the service/charity? We need both feet – both charity and justice – if we are in this for the long haul. Direct service is important but it is also important to start asking 'why' we are doing what we are doing and what the causes are of the injustice and poverty we witness.

H. Rakku's Baby exercise: We are going to do an exercise to practice asking some of these 'why' questions. Listen to this story. Take a few moments to think to yourself, write it down if you would like, the reason WHY Rakku's baby died.

Rakku's Baby

Rakku did not breastfeed her baby; she had to work in the landowner's field from dawn to dusk. As both a landless peasant and a woman, Rakku was paid far too little to feed her family, so she took her seven year and ten year old children to work to help her earn more. She left the baby in the hut under the care of the five year old daughter. Even with the older children working beside her in the fields, Rakku's earnings could not buy enough food. Often times the baby went hungry. A vicious cycle resulted with the baby's

increasing under-nutrition and repeated bouts of diarrhea. One day, the baby had severe diarrhea and grew limp, and Rakku decided to take her into the hospital in the city. To do this, Rakku had to miss a day's work. At best, this meant a day without food, for the family had no reserves. At worst, she could lose her job- the consequences which she was afraid to think about. She knew a wiser mother would let her baby die to preserve the family, but Rakku loved her baby too much.

Rakku sold the last of her possessions to pay for the bus fare and took the child to the hospital. After waiting in line for hours, she was told she was too late and must come back the next day. Rakku slept in the street with the baby and returned the next morning. By then the baby was near death. The doctor scolded Rakku for waiting so long and for not taking better care of the baby. He referred her to a nurse, who carefully explained the importance of breastfeeding and hygiene. Rakku listened silently. Meanwhile, the doctor skillfully rehydrated the baby with an intravenous solution. Within a short time, the baby showed considerable improvement from the intravenous sugar water. The doctor gave Rakku a prescription for medicines to buy at the pharmacy, and sent her home.

Back home, with no food or money in the house, the baby soon died.

*Story based on a book by Sheila Zurbrigg

I. To discuss: Take a few moments to think to yourself, write it down if you would like, Why did Rakku's baby die?

J.

(Make a list of all of the reasons) This is just the beginning of looking at some of the reasons in this situation. We can see that there is no clear answer and that is quite complex!

K. **Roots of our Belief Exercise:** Before we go on our immersion trip it is important for us to begin to look at what some of those complex ideas about poverty or the people we will be with are. Part of awareness is taking some time to examine some of our ideas, assumptions and beliefs about the people we will be with over winter break. What have your family, friends, religion, media, and your education taught you about the people you will be serving?

(Read the group to see if this is something they seem to want to share or keep to themselves. Be sure to collect them (tell them you won't read them) as we will use this for an ending exercise too.

- You could if you like introduce some brief information or facts about the locations you are going to. Ecuador for example use the “Fun Facts about Ecuador” in your packets.

L. ***Simplicity is my Gospel (focus on defining simplicity)**

St. Vincent wore the same cloak with all people, rich and poor. He said the virtue he loved most was “simplicity,” which for him meant a consistent honesty and transparency before others. He was clear and forthright about his mission, his intentions, and in his dealings with people.

Scarred Coin Story – Fr. Thomas McKenna

"Tell me why you'd ever want to help somebody who was repulsive - whom you didn't even know." Put more graphically, "You're walking down Union Turnpike near the University and there in front of you a little crowd is gathering around someone lying on the sidewalk. You walk over and see it's a badly dressed older man, disheveled, fairly drunk and he can't get up. Just as you walk over, someone from the crowd picks him up, sits him on the curb, talks to him, has someone call a cab, pays the driver and finally sends him home." Then, I would pose the key questions, "Why would anyone do that?" "What is there in that stumbling old man that's worth doing something for him like that?"

The signature response of Vincent de Paul to the human dignity question - "Why help this disheveled old man?" is "Because you've seen through to the other side of the coin."

Vincent's metaphor is of a beat-up, dented, scratched, scarred, and very common coin, which turns out to have another side. It is applied to the beat-up, dented, dime-a-dozen, mostly invisible ones-- the poor people. "Why treat that common nobody on the ground as if he is somebody?" Here is Vincent's answer:

I shouldn't judge poor peasants, men or women, by their surface appearance, nor by their apparent mental capacities. And this is hard to do, since very frequently they scarcely seem to have the semblance or the intelligence of reasonable beings, so gross and so offensive are they. But, turn the coin, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, Whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by just these people. (XI Conference #19, p.32)

One virtue that Vincent lived was "simplicity" and he said on a number of occasions that it was his favorite virtue. **For Vincent, it meant learning to be the same on the outside as you are on the inside. Learning to tell things as they really are. Being genuine. Staying away from doubletalk and flim-flam. Keeping truth in your packaging.**

In another place he writes. "Your heart must not think one thing while your mouth says another." (IX, Conference 13, p.81) In another, "Steer clear of all duplicity, two-facedness, cunning, studied cleverness and double meaning." (II, #634, p.340) In still another, he

confesses to how much consolation he gets by "keeping a conscious intent to say things as they are." (I, #94 p.144)

Concisely, Vincent's "simplicity" is a personal "transparency," squaring up outside appearances with inner attitudes, congruence between the symbol and what's symbolized. He insisted on it, and said the dignity of other people is not honored unless you treat them with simplicity."

- a. Simple living or simplicity is not simple. Many diverse expressions of simplicity of living are emerging in response to the challenges and opportunities of our times. To present a more realistic picture of the scope of simple living for today's complex world here are ten different approaches.
 - i. Pass out "Garden of Simplicity" sheet
 - ii. Go around in a group and have each person read one approach to simplicity
- b. In groups of three, discuss the questions at the end of the "Garden of Simplicity" sheet **(10 min)**
- c. Come back as a large group **(15 min)**
 - i. What did people discuss?

Simple living can help us to figure out what is "really important" in life (i.e. what we *value* like in our ice breaker). Have you ever really gone without something or experienced a real absence of someone?
Happenings such as these bring out certain reactions from us. They help us realize what is important and what is not. They help us sort out the extras and make up our life. When we go without the distraction, the interference lessens, our vision clears, and we come to a great awareness of what is really important in our life. God is certainly a part of that. The less we have in our way, the more we realize this. Also, it can bring us in closer solidarity with those we serve

M. ***Defining Simple Living Within Our Community**

- a. Keeping this in mind, how does the group want to define simple living? **(10 min)**
 - i. Remind people that they are all signing up for this. It is a communal decision. (There is a danger in saying "We will figure it out when we get there; people might have different opinions on what is acceptable.)
 - ii. Our goal is to help make a GROUP definition and have everyone understand what is acceptable to others in the group.
 - iii. Write done responses to the following questions
 1. What kinds of things will you not take along?
 2. How will you act?
 3. What will you wear, and not wear?
 4. How will you pack? What will you pack or not pack?

5. Will you share some things, instead of have everyone bring their own

N. ❖ **CLOSING PRAYER**

“Simplicity is the cleaning of our hearts, to make room for the things that really matter. It requires that we take inventory of what’s in there, and take everything out that doesn’t align with our purpose or beliefs. Simplicity means making space for God to dwell in us, to clear out all the garbage that we believe and try to follow”

***Choose a portion to read**

Simplicity of life is concerned with our relationship to things. But the heart of its meaning is the relatedness of persons. It is positive and blessed because it is grounded in the right order of valuing persons over objects.

Life is for people: hence, simplicity.

We travel light enough so that the goods of the earth may be enjoyed and celebrated by all, so that they may bring glory to God. We travel light enough so that we ourselves may be for persons, rather than expend our lives collecting, maintaining, and replacing objects.

In simplicity, we are empowered to see the destitute, to share of our abundance, to ease the dehumanizing poverty which cries out to us. It enables us to give freely, to be more equitable. It frees us to engage the injustices of the world which are often the source of degradation. It makes us less fearful to put our securities at risk.

In simplicity, we are given the time to enter the grace of our human poverty. If we do not surround and suffocate ourselves with things, by which we manage and control our lives, we are far less likely to believe in the illusion that we have no need for God. We would less likely pretend that we are “self-made” men and women. Simplicity, as a liberation from the chains of consumerism, is also a call to prayer, wherein we encounter our spiritual poverty before God and discover the joy of recognizing ourselves as loved and forgiven creatures. Simplicity, moreover, gives us time for each other, for relationships and intimacy and friendship. A simple change in our style of working, consuming or spending time with television profoundly affects our availability for persons.

Simplicity is as related to love as it is to justice.

It is freedom from compulsive addictions and entrenched escape mechanisms.

It is liberty to see ourselves anew and to disengage from the comforts that blind us to the face of the poor.

It unfetters us, that we might play and savor the moment, that we might give thanks and sing appreciation.

It can unlock us, finally, that we might do bold things, that we might more fully be men and women, not for things, but for others.

-John F. Kavanaugh

O. **Reminders and shout outs**

- a. Next meeting day/time/location
- b. Food arrangements for next meeting
- c. Any logistical information
- d. Shout outs

Values Challenges

- ❖ A lifetime of financial security
- ❖ A chance to direct the destiny of a nation
- ❖ An understanding of the meaning of life
- ❖ A chance to eliminate poverty and sickness
- ❖ Success in my chosen profession or vocation
- ❖ A personal relationship with God
- ❖ A strong spiritual life
- ❖ A long life free of illness
- ❖ Mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)
- ❖ A community of caring, supportive individuals
- ❖ International fame and popularity
- ❖ Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)
- ❖ A lovely home in a beautiful setting
- ❖ A lifetime of happiness
- ❖ A healthy, loving family environment
- ❖ Freedom (independence and free choice)
- ❖ National security
- ❖ Equality (equal opportunity for all)
- ❖ The ability to answer any question you were asked
- ❖ The ability to answer any question you ask yourself
- ❖ A world of peace (free from war or conflict)
- ❖ The promise of wealth beyond your wildest dreams
- ❖ A world without borders
- ❖ Sustainable life for every being on the planet
- ❖ The ability to accept everyone for who they are
- ❖ A world of racial harmony
- ❖ A world without disease
- ❖ Quality medical care for all
- ❖ Predominance of you religion/religious values
- ❖ Ability to approach things with an open mind
- ❖ Religious harmony
- ❖ The ability to make decisions free from governmental control
- ❖ Other _____

The Garden of Simplicity

By Duane Elgin, author of *Voluntary Simplicity*

1. **Choiceful Simplicity:** Simplicity means choosing our path through life consciously, deliberately, and of our own accord. As a path that emphasizes freedom, a choiceful simplicity also means staying focused, diving deep, and not being distracted by consumer culture. It means consciously organizing our lives so that we give our "true gifts" to the world -- which is to give the essence of ourselves. As Emerson said, "The only true gift is a portion of yourself."

2. **Commercial Simplicity:** Simplicity means there is a rapidly growing market for healthy and sustainable products and services of all kinds -- from home-building materials and energy systems to foods.
3. **Compassionate Simplicity:** Simplicity means to feel such a sense of kinship with others that we "choose to live simply so that others may simply live." A compassionate simplicity means feeling a bond with the community of life and drawn toward a path of reconciliation -- with other species and future generations as well as, for example, between those with great differences of wealth and opportunity. A compassionate simplicity is a path of cooperation and fairness that seeks a future of mutually assured development for all.
4. **Ecological Simplicity:** Simplicity means to choose ways of living that touch the Earth more lightly and that reduce our ecological footprint. An ecological simplicity appreciates our deep interconnection with the web of life and is mobilized by threats to its well-being (such as climate change, species-extinction, and resource depletion).
5. **Elegant Simplicity:** Simplicity means that the way we live our lives represents a work of unfolding artistry. As Gandhi said, "My life is my message." In this spirit, an elegant simplicity is an understated, organic aesthetic that contrasts with the excess of consumerist lifestyles.
6. **Frugal Simplicity:** Simplicity means that, by cutting back on spending that is not truly serving our lives, and by practicing skillful management of our personal finances, we can achieve greater financial independence. Living with less also decreases the impact of our consumption upon the Earth and frees resources for others.
7. **Natural Simplicity:** Simplicity means to remember our deep roots in the natural world. It means to experience our connection with the ecology of life in which we are immersed and to balance our experience of the human-created environments with time in nature. A natural simplicity feels a deep reverence for the community of life on Earth and accepts that the non-human realms of plants and animals have their dignity and rights as well the human.
8. **Political Simplicity:** Simplicity means organizing our collective lives in ways that enable us to live more lightly and sustainably on the Earth which, in turn, involves changes in nearly every area of public life -- from transportation and education to the design of our homes, cities, and workplaces.
9. **Soulful Simplicity:** Simplicity means to approach life as a meditation and to cultivate our experience of intimate connection with all that exists. A spiritual presence infuses the world and, by living simply, we can more directly awaken to the living universe that surrounds and sustains us, moment by moment.
10. **Uncluttered Simplicity:** Simplicity means taking charge of a life that is too busy, too stressed, and too fragmented. An uncluttered simplicity means cutting back on trivial distractions, both material and non-material, and focusing on the essentials -- whatever those may be for each of our unique lives.

REFLECT...

Do you feel like you already live a simple lifestyle in some ways?

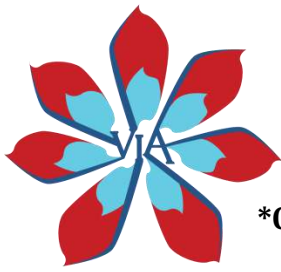
If so, how? If not, why not?

Why is it important to live a simple lifestyle? Why are we doing this?

Why is it so difficult to lead a simple lifestyle in today's society?

How would you like to see yourself live simply during your trip?

How would you like to see your group live simply during your trip?



2009 Winter Break Prep Meeting #3

The way of Solidarity and Spirituality

*Objectives:

- Continue with the way of dialogue through discussing spirituality
- Introduce the way of solidarity
- Begin to recognize the gifts in the group
- Define a group mission statement/the heart of your immersion

P. ***Food and socializing!**

Q. ***Ice breaker/Community Builder** (Depending on how your group is forming will depend on the icebreaker you use. At this point a more high-risk community builder is possible.)

R. ***Centering and Prayer: Meditation on Hands**

I invite you into a space of quiet and peace, to ground yourself by noticing your contact with chair and floor, by sitting straight, by becoming aware of your breathing. Look at your hands. They've been through a lot, those hands ... they have strengths, scars, beauty.... I invite you to remember that it is your hands that do the work of love in the world. These hands may hold another's hands. These hands may type emails to politicians, sign cards of consolation and congratulation. These hands may patiently teach, quilt works of beauty or write words urging peace. These hands may bathe children, feed elders, nurse the ill, work the earth, organize communities. These hands clasp in prayer, open in release, grasp in solidarity, clench in righteous anger. These hands are God's hands, your hands, our hands; a great mystery of flesh and intention, a great potential of embodied love. (*Continue in silence*)

S. ***Safe space** (Revisit your safe space guidelines you have created. Be sure to have them displayed during the meeting and add to them if people want to add anything.)

T. ***The Way of Solidarity and Spirituality**

a. **Spirituality:**

Ask: What comes to mind when you hear the word spirituality?

“The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but it leads us deeper into it.” –Henri J.M

- a. Service without reflection is just work. Reflection is necessary in order to better understand the complexity of the issues that people on the margins face in their daily lives. Each night, you will gather to reflect on the day. These discussions will provide opportunities for you to process your experience and learn from each other. Your challenge is to look deeply at

your life and your source of living. **For St. Vincent DePaul and Louise de Marillac, their service with the poor was rooted in Jesus Christ. What motivates you? Whether or not you come from a religious background or specific faith tradition, your experience on your immersion will challenge you to look more deeply at your motivating source and life values.**

- b. **Object Share:** Before the meeting ask each person to bring an object that is significant to them, that represent their spirituality or how they find meaning in their life.
 - i. Invite each participant to share the object with the group
 - ii. As each person is sharing please listen to learn something new about them.
 - iii. Invite them to pass around the object so others can see it.
- b. **Ritual:** Share an example of a meaningful ritual. How do rituals bring us together in solidarity?

Wiesner Excerpts:

*“We enter into solidarity with the poor when the distinction between we and they no longer applies. The distinction breaks down and we are the poor, one among them. **We have, it is true, differing talents, life experiences, but the fundamental point is that we stand together as one, of one mind and heart in the midst of political, economic, and social structures that oppress.** We approach the world with the same outlook. We approach it aware of our different backgrounds and roles, aware of our sinfulness, limitations and weaknesses, but with mutual love and respect.*

Our experience in the Way of Solidarity is the experience of the justice of God. We live in solidarity with God and the poor. The differential of “us” and “them” no longer exists. **We no longer see the poor as perfect but rather as human beings.** The acts of service and justice remain a part of our lives. Our relationship with the poor and with God is one of unity and peace.

Just as we must view the poor as simply human, likewise as a team we must come to this understanding that we are no better or worse than our counterparts. We must come to admire each other’s strengths and help them with their weaknesses. What changes is our relationship with ourselves and then with each other. Wiesner says that solidarity,

Solidarity “is what directs our lives and actions, gives us energy, and expresses itself in an inner peace that is the consequence of reconciliation within ourselves with the poor and with the God of the poor. Solidarity becomes a motive force of how we view the world and live within it, and of how we experience God.”

- **When in your life have you experienced a moment of solidarity?**

This part is just another option of how you might explore this topic of spirituality depending on your group dynamics.

[Below are some questions for reflection. Use the questions for quiet time to reflect on your spiritual life and your journey with God or a Divine Presence in your life. Share with your community members whatever you are comfortable with. This could

lead into a discussion on how people describe that which is bigger than themselves.

Are people comfortable with the word God?

*** Methods of reflecting (Using art, journaling, quiet meditation, etc) **15 min**

1. What are some of my images of God? How have they changed throughout my life to the present?
2. What has been the deepest and/or most moving and memorable experience of God's presence in my life/or moments when you felt profound solidarity with another.
3. Who are the people who have been most influential in helping me to recognize God in my life?
4. How does God play a role in my life at this very moment? Have I found God in my volunteer experience in the past? Where? How?

When everyone is ready to share, remember that what you share with others, and they with you, is really an important moment and a gift. Use the skills of open and receptive listening to receive the faith sharing of your community members with gratitude. ***Methods of sharing (one on one, small groups, as a large group)] **15 min**

Hands are for Building:

- Each participant trace their hands on paper, cut them out, and write their names within the palm. They are also invited to decorate the front of the hand as they please (i.e. add nails, knuckles)
- Ask the group to turn the hand with the palm facing up and write on each finger something that they can contribute to the group during the service immersion
- On the second hand, ask them to respond to the question: "Why do you want to go on a service immersion?"
- Encourage the group to write on each finger or write longer phrases on the palm. They should aim for five.
- Present each question again after everyone is finished and ask for volunteers to share.
- Ask: What does everyone think about these hands as a symbol?

The Heart of Winter Break 2009 to _____(insert location)

- After listening to each participant's gifts to contribute and motivations for going the goal is now to create a Group Mission/Purpose Statement. This statement will be shared at the large group send-off in some way. This is the heart of who you are as a group, how you hope to be in the community you are sent to, and your purpose in going.

- “A mission statement defines in a paragraph any entity’s reason for existence. It embodies its philosophies, goals, ambitions and mores. Any entity that attempts to operate without a mission statement runs the risk of wandering through the world without having the ability to verify that it is on its intended course.” (missionstatement.com)
- The statement could include:
 - Build on the ways and tenets of VIA
 - Be specific to your immersion trip and who you will be with
 - Some hopes for the immersion
 - Some hopes for your group of how you want to be in community
 - Some hopes for your group of how you want to be with the communities we encounter

Mission Statement (This is an example from Loyola Maryland Project Mexico Immersion trip)

- To educate ourselves and explore the social justice issues faced by people of developing countries
- To serve alongside people in need of schools, shelters and community development projects
- To reflect on all that we experience in light of the various beliefs, expertise, value systems and faith or spiritual perspectives that participants may bring to the team
- To form relationships and a community with the Mexican people through immersion in the Mexican culture
- To build and experience a strong community among our team members
- To bring the spirit of Mexico back to the Loyola community
- To foster personal growth in the exploration of our commitments to service, justice, and our own values, spirituality or worldview

Closing Prayer “Heart and hand should go together as far as possible.” – St. Vincent DePaul

Reminders and shout outs

- Any logistical information – packing lists will be emailed
- Shout outs – Reminder about Send Off on November 16th