

## The church and voluntary service

“When the church understands its vocation, voluntary service is a useful instrument, consistent with its vision.”

by J. Wilbur Patterson

As you probably know, the Presbyterian Church is at a crossroads in its history. It is restructuring *how* it works at the national level but that process inevitably affects what it *does* also. Restructure inevitably involves the loss of some institutional memory. There is no guarantee that our denomination's strong commitment to voluntary service will continue. When John DeBoer asked me to speak to the JSAC Voluntary Task Force, therefore, I decided to address myself to the subject: The Church and Voluntary Service Need Each Other.

I stated that thesis very confidently, yet it is not obvious that it is true. In the first place, “voluntary” is not necessarily a theological word, like “ministry” or “diaconal” are. As we use the term today it is a product of our modern tendency to categorize and specialize. People have helped each other for centuries without calling themselves “volunteers.” I am not trying to put the word down, for “volunteer” is a good word. It suggests organized activity, non-compulsory participation, something done without a wage or salary attached. It implies relative freedom of choice among optional activities. There is nothing wrong with that. But as we think about what we are doing, we need to remember that “volunteer” tends to take on the color of the context in which it occurs. It is a bit of a chameleon.

So what does this chameleon activity look like in the Christian context? What helps us to color it “Christian”?

Again, I come back to the judgment that the church and voluntary service do not obviously belong together even though the church is probably the largest consumer of volunteer time of any institution in our nation. Or it may be more accurate to say that the obvious reasons for programs of voluntary service are not reasons why the *church should* have such programs. Let me dispose of one obvious reason immediately. Volunteers are not cheap labor, not from any perspective worthy of the church.

The church and voluntary service need each other. Why that is so, I

think, rests in the paradoxical relationship between *vulnerability* and *empowerment*. I understand that relationship as paradoxical rather than contradictory because of the revealing mystery of Jesus Christ. Christ reveals me for what I am. Christ reveals the world we know for what it is in all of its pretension by placing it in the presence of its Creator. But Christ is mystery and cannot be explained fully in any human figure of speech or contained by any human experiment.

There are many perspectives we bring to understanding the mystery of Jesus Christ. The perspective I want to emphasize is suggested by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi. *Paul, you will recall, was not a volunteer but a draftee who subsequently volunteered for life.* He understood the mystery of Jesus Christ as originating in a voluntary choice and action, and the goal of that choice and action was *empowerment*, but empowerment with a different kind of power than our culturally conditioned forms of power. Let's hear how Paul stated it:

“The divine nature was (Christ's) from the first; yet (Christ) did not think to snatch at equality with God but made (self) nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Born as a human, with all human attributes, Jesus humbled (self) and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted Christ and gave Christ the highest of names, so that the slave Jesus is now the Lord of the cosmos.



"Therefore, you must be obedient — not to me, however. Through your faith in Jesus, you must work out your own salvation in fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both in will and in deed for God's own chosen purpose." (Phil. 2:5-13 from NEB, RSV and JWP)

It is not self-evident except perhaps to depth psychology and to theology that a lot of human power is a way to hide our "fear and trembling." Paul lays it right out front that one of the symptoms of the empowerment of and by the spirit of God is fear and trembling. *Vulnerability!* Did Jesus experience fear? You'd better believe it! Luke says, "In great anguish he prayed; his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

Slaves and servants learn to live with fear. Masters try to insulate themselves against the necessity of fear.

In an article on volunteering that appeared in *The Other Side* a year ago, Rich Sider, a volunteer with the Mennonite Central Committee, is quoted: "What's the hardest part about being a volunteer? For me, it's feeling *vulnerable*." The kind of vulnerability he was speaking about was opening yourself to new experiences — language, culture, people. But, as Sider affirmed, if you learn you can cope, "You learn not to be afraid of new experiences. You discover, hey, I can handle changes."

Volunteering as self-discovery is something I want to come back to. The focus now is on vulnerability by choice. My mind cannot wrap itself around the infinite change from Omnipotent Grace to the execution

of a renegade terrorist, or something like that, which Paul describes. But my mind can wrap itself around the choice of vulnerability by a young adult volunteer in contra-distinction to the drift I see in my church.

The direction of that drift is toward professionalism and the various kinds of security measures that tend to accompany professionalism. The consultants our church seeks out as it restructures itself are accountants, personnel managers who understand job factoring, corporate relocation consultants, and we have named a management consultant as our top executive. I do not say that these people should not be consulted or employed. But I do know that there is a witness that was just beginning to be heard from volunteers that my church has not even considered yet. The church must hear this witness if its own witness to the world in the name of Jesus Christ is to have any power.

### An element of witness

The Presbyterian Church has talked quite a bit about lifestyle change as an element of witness. We have a reminder of what that means in our midst in the persons of half-a-dozen young adults working as "program assistants" or "interns" as they were originally called. They work in several different offices which employ them. The Volunteers in Mission office was asked to bring some coordination and pastoral care to the program and people, modeling our approach from some elements present in voluntary service units, though the group does not live as a unit. Though they are paid a subsistence stipend, they find that in New York City that is a volunteer's vulnerable lifestyle.

They are employed on an annual basis, so every year there is the necessary trauma of finding affordable housing in New York City. It is a somewhat shared experience, partly a lonely individual struggle. Most of us who live in the suburbs find ourselves ill-equipped to be of any help. But that kind of struggle brings our staff closer to the birthing experience of the church than most other things we do. For in its birth, the church had to struggle with getting and sharing food and shelter in a not too friendly city. That was the Spirit's real testing of the church.

We have a somewhat comparable but larger cadre of international subsistence service workers. Altogether, these near-volunteers bring liveliness, diversity, ideas. Several have given significant service in places where low visibility is important. And through it all, we know (or at least those of us involved know) that it is

worth it for churches to take on the "bother" of arranging, recruiting, training, placing and staying in touch with volunteers. National structures of churches too easily assume that only professionals are worth bothering with. This kind of practical vulnerability is important in building community at all levels of church life.

On the other hand, my church taught me an important lesson nearly 20 years ago when I was just getting into administering voluntary service programs. Theologically, it taught me to understand the saving power of Jesus Christ in terms of empowerment, and that empowerment is not something cloudy and vague but is reflected in self-worth and self-respect. Jesus Christ brought sight to the blind, and self-respect to the poor and the outcasts. Programmatically back in that day, I heard that theology of empowerment expressed in terms like this: "Whitey, if your volunteers think they are coming in here where we live to *help* us, tell them we don't need their help. If they want to join us in our struggle, we'll consider the offer."

In a new book, *Ministry of the Dispossessed*, Pat Hoffman describes the risky venture made by the National Farm Worker Ministry in California when it decided to trust the United Farm Workers to know what they needed to do and to place the church at the service of the UFW. We don't always do that in our voluntary service programs and we know such trust of those we say we want to help can put strains on our relationships with our church constituency.

In an interview with Chris Hartmire when he was director of NFWM, Hoffman found that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a key person in Hartmire's perspective and strategy. She quotes a particularly meaningful portion of one of Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison*:

*God let himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us....Christ helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering...The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering. Only the suffering God can help. (This is the) God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness.*

Paul knew that the vulnerability of Jesus was not an exercise in self-expression alone. It was a choice made with the intention of *empowerment*, not empowering the already powerful but those who tended to

grapevine vol. 19 no. 1 June 1987

Grapevine is published monthly, except in August and December, by the Joint Strategy and Action Committee, Inc., a coalition of the national mission agencies of Christian denominations.

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experience life as victims—victims of their own choices to some extent but especially victims of choices made by the powerful.

#### **What kind of vulnerability?**

While the church needs the volunteers' witness about the vulnerability, voluntary service needs the biblical witness entrusted to the church about the kind of vulnerability that empowers the powerless. In an article about volunteers in one of our New Jersey newspapers not long ago, a consultant at a Voluntary Action Center said that "volunteers offer their time and energy out of a desire to do something self-fulfilling," and, she added, they will tend to stick with it "if that satisfaction is sustained."

We know that is true. Rich Sider, the former Mennonite volunteer, said much the same thing. Clearly, people who recruit and use volunteers need

to help the volunteer experience be a satisfying one.

But self-satisfaction, the educational value in voluntary service, is not sufficient reason for the church to take it seriously. Educational institutions are appropriately stepping into that gap today. Color voluntary service as self-development and encourage our educational system to take it seriously. I'm for that.

I am more skeptical of people who think in terms of massive numbers of young adults siphoned off city streets or away from the jobless job market in the name of voluntary national service. Voluntary service ought not to be a safety valve to soften the pressure of legitimate complaints, to forestall real change, to maintain our present power structures.

Permit me a brief historical reflection. Voluntary service as we identify with it—that is, full-time

voluntary service—really began to blossom after World War II. Its distinctive feature lies in the tradition of the peace churches. Voluntary service became an instrument for reconstruction and reconciliation. In that respect, it was filling the vocation of the peace churches; it was a way of expressing their reason for being.

The rest of us picked up on it at that point. The development of voluntary service, I believe, created opportunities for peacemaking activity. It built a foundation for peacemaking to become accepted as an integral part of the vocation of the church. Voluntary service is still one of the best avenues the churches provide for young and old to act out the Christian calling to be peacemakers. In the Presbyterian Church it was not accidental that the Rev. John Conner, a formative influence in integrating peacemaking into the life of our church, was also a strong

supporter of voluntary service while he was moderator of the church.

### What kind of security?

When the church understands its vocation, voluntary service is a useful instrument that can be consistent with the church's vocation. It also forces the church to come to grips with life's realities.

There is something very basic at work here. The structures of security we build so carefully in our modern world find their most typical expression these days in pension systems. Pension systems are powerful players in the world's biggest gamble—the stock market. Pension systems are only as secure as public trust in the ability of money to make money.

Our Lord may have been vulner-

able, but he was also shrewd. He told his disciples once, "I tell you, make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones..." (Luke 16:9-10) Luke then went on in the Acts of the Apostles to describe what this statement meant. For the eternal home found its expression and shape in the life together in community which those disciples built through sharing of work as well as sharing risk.

The community we build with each other and across the divisions of our society is a far more solid base for security than all of the wealth traded on Wall Street. And community is built on faithfulness in small things.

Remember how the witness of the church was about to break down until they realized that someone else could serve at the common table, so deacons were named and the name "deacon" means a table-server. It might just as well mean a secretary or a janitor. Faithfulness in small things is the foundation of community, and community is the only solid base for security. And for people to be empowered, our Lord left his eternal home and girded himself with a towel to wash his disciples' feet.

J. Wilber Patterson is director of voluntary service for the Presbyterian Church in the USA. This article is based on a speech he gave to the JSAC Voluntary Service Task Force.

# Volunteers are 'ruined for life'

## Flexibility and an attitude of servanthood may be keys to a positive experience

by Philip Harnden

**R**ight now hundreds of volunteers are serving in North America and overseas. They're tutoring teenagers in Appalachia. They're building houses in Kenya. They're working for peace in Nicaragua.

And every year many more jobs open up. If you're unfamiliar with voluntary service, some of these openings might surprise you:

— an environmental group in Wisconsin wants someone to help band birds and study eagle migration

— a peace and reconciliation center in Northern Ireland needs a bus driver

— a service project in India is looking for an auto mechanic

— a wilderness program for low-income kids in Colorado needs a "trekking coordinator" to lead backpacking and snowshoeing trips.

No matter what your age, skills, or experience, you can almost surely be matched with a job somewhere that needs doing. Dozens of voluntary-service organizations are waiting to link you up with that job. The question is, what does it take to be a volunteer, to do theology with your sleeves rolled up?

Volunteers need some personal qualities such as independence and

an ability to take initiative. A good sense of humor can come in handy, too, as can a readiness for the unexpected.

"Flexibility," says Rich Sider of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is the single most important quality. "When you're a volunteer, a lot of questions can't be answered ahead of time. That's when you need flexibility."

Rich and his wife Martha served for three years in Swaziland and later spent a term as volunteers in Guatemala.

"What's the hardest part about being a volunteer? For me, it's feeling vulnerable," says Rich. "That's felt most at the beginning of an assignment. The language is new. The culture is new. You're in a very vulnerable position and you have to find your own way."

"But if you go into that situation and find you can cope, this does give you confidence. You learn not to be afraid of new experiences. You discover, hey, I can handle changes."

Today Rich is a director of personnel development for MCC. What motivations does his agency look for when screening volunteer applicants? In answering, Rich draws an important distinction.

"We're are looking for people with an attitude of wanting to *serve*, not an attitude of wanting to *help*. We don't want people who think they're God's gift to the world."

Others in voluntary-service agencies echo Rich's distinction. Volunteers who view themselves as fortunate, advantaged people who can help unfortunate, disadvantaged people may be in for some rude awakenings.

There's a saying among former volunteers that those who went to Latin America came back revolutionaries, those who served in Asia came back mystics, and those who spent their term in Africa now like to sit around drinking beer and telling good stories.

### Values are likely to change

Whether that observation is accurate or not, the volunteer experience changes people. "Ruined for life" is how members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) put it.

Louise Kearns served two years with the Jesuits doing community organizing on the east coast of the United States.

"After your volunteer experience, you'll look at life differently," she says. "You'll be ruined in that sense."

You'll be downwardly mobile instead of upwardly mobile. You'll always have in your heart the option for the poor."

After working alongside disempowered people in urban neighborhoods, Louise, like many ex-volunteers, has found that her values and life goals are fundamentally different from those of most other people in the society around her. "I can't imagine working in the corporate world, trying to get people to buy a new Coke instead of old Coke."

Not only are a volunteer's values likely to change, but even one's original motivation for volunteering can get turned upside-down. "You may meet people who are 20 times stronger than you are," says Louise. "And they were who you thought you'd be helping!" Instead you discover ways you need their help. "You'll find places within yourself where you are poor," is how she puts it.

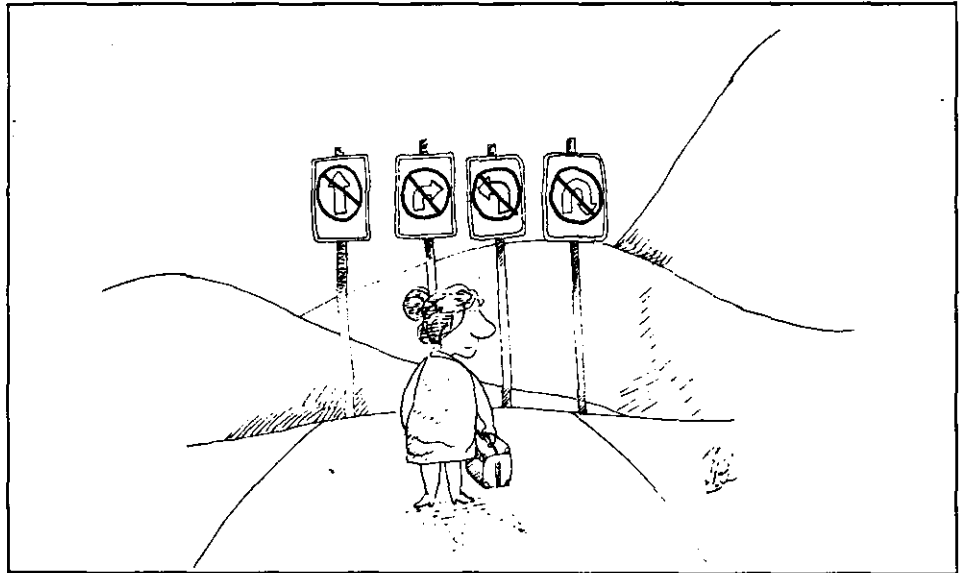
Volunteers may also come to new understandings about their own position in society. "Being involved in empowerment work made me look at how I was being oppressed as a woman," recalls Louise. "I looked at my church. It's difficult to realize that your church, the one you grew up in and trusted, is oppressing you. But now I can never go back and look at the church the way I used to. Now I believe we need to be working in an organizing sense to change it."

Since finishing her term with JVC three years ago, Louise has been the director of a community-based energy conservation and weatherization program. Looking back over her experience as a volunteer, she says, "I'll never be able to close my eyes again."

Prospective volunteers should first see if their denomination runs a volunteer program. Ask your priest or pastor. By working in a denominational or diocesan program, volunteers have the advantage of being in a religious setting that feels familiar. And such a program may also be more adept at providing the kind of support from back home that can be so important to a positive volunteer experience.

In any case, when considering voluntary service, volunteers should be sure to examine carefully the sponsoring agency to minimize the unexpected once they are on board. What is its church affiliation? Do they feel comfortable with its religious perspective? Is it financially stable? (They can always ask for a copy of the organization's annual report.)

Does this organization operate its own social-service projects? Or does



Barricada/Managua

it assign its volunteers to projects run by other groups? Are these other groups church or community related? Does it matter? What kind of discretion will they have over assignments?

Knowing when an agency began its volunteer program and how many volunteers it now has can tell something about its depth of experience. Match this information with personal needs. An established agency may be better able to provide stability and support. But in a newer or smaller agency with a looser structure, one may find more elbowroom for one's energy and creativity. What's more important?

Any organization can put people in touch with some former volunteers. Don't overlook these valuable resource people as you evaluate a program. Talk to them about their experiences.

Some agencies make placements only in North America. Others place volunteers only overseas. And some have both domestic and international programs.

If the whole world seems like a rather large area to choose from, remember that one's globe of possibilities will become smaller once you begin choosing the types of projects which interest you. For instance, not many agricultural advisors are placed in Tokyo or Chicago. Options will narrow considerably as one learns more about which agencies need

what kind of work done where.

Most agencies welcome "generalists." These are people—usually young folks out of school—with no particular job experience or skills. But today many organizations want people with proven experience or particular skills, even professions.

Most agencies also have age minimums and some have restrictions on family size. But that doesn't mean that volunteering is only for the young and footloose. A seventy-four-year-old great-grandmother just completed her term at a soup kitchen in Chicago. Other folks have done voluntary service as a way to kick off their retirement.

"We find that these people do as well if not better than the younger volunteers," says David McFadden of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS). "They have added patience—especially if they've raised kids! Their work experiences and life experiences can be translated into success at a project."

Some agencies, such as BVS, have programs specifically geared toward older volunteers. The Mennonite Board of Missions provides a way for retirees who spend their winters down south to hook up with short-term volunteer projects in Florida, Arizona, or Texas. Other organizations are willing to make special allowances for "midlife people" who want to take time off from their

careers or spend a sabbatical year in service. Just as agencies want volunteers who are flexible, so the agencies themselves can often be quite flexible about modifying their requirements, especially if your skill is in particular demand.

A few groups insist that volunteers be members of a particular church. Others evidently welcome applications from anyone, including people with no religious background. Being aware of such differences can clue people in to expectations the various agencies may have. It might also give people an idea of what other volunteers would be like in each organization.

### What are the cultural attitudes?

Another good clue about an agency can be found in the kind of orientation or training it provides to new volunteers. Will volunteers go through carefully planned orientation sessions, focusing on the volunteer experience and the new culture they will soon be entering? Or, does the agency simply assume one gets all the necessary introduction on the job? If not much emphasis is put on appreciating the culture in which they will be serving, does this tell them something? Does it mean the agency has a paternalistic, top-down approach in the locations where it works?

Most organizations which are serious about nurturing their volunteers will provide not only orientation but also in-service retreats and a post-service debriefing. That final session can be crucial after having been "ruined for life" by the volunteer experience. Some agencies even make a point of connecting returned volunteers with local justice work in their home communities. That's a holistic approach.

Volunteers should also pay attention to the questions *they* ask. What they want to know is one indication of what they value. Do they share the same concerns? Or do their questions seem off base? Do they screen applicants carefully? Or will they take anyone they can get?

Dorothy Day used to say that every Catholic Worker community is made up of saints—and the martyrs who must live with them. She knew firsthand about the difficulties that can arise whenever people live and work together in a closely bound group. Yet many volunteers find that "life together" is the most enriching part of their experience.

Living arrangements vary from agency to agency and even from assignment to assignment. Volunteers sometimes live alone. But more often they live with a local family or

in a household with other volunteers. Volunteers should be clear about the arrangements before they sign on. Then be flexible enough to turn any surprises into rewards.

A different area where surprises will not be so welcome is the area of finances. Most agencies provide for room and board. But who pays the doctor when one gets sick? Some organizations expect you to help raise your own support; so be sure to find out what the obligations are in this regard, too.

Travel costs can be a major item, especially for overseas placements. Who pays the travel fare to and from the assignment? How about travel to orientation, to retreats, and to that final debriefing session? What if the volunteer decides to leave the assignment earlier than anticipated? Volunteers better get such matters settled before boarding the plane for Timbuktu! Expect any reputable organization to give a clear contract or covenant answering these and other questions.

In addition to paying living expenses, most voluntary-service agencies will give volunteers a modest spending allowance each month. The amounts provided by groups that emphasize simple living may at first glance seem ridiculous.

In gathering details about programs, don't overlook the bigger picture. What exactly is this organization trying to accomplish through its voluntary-service program? Is it serious about providing social services? Or are those services just a cover for

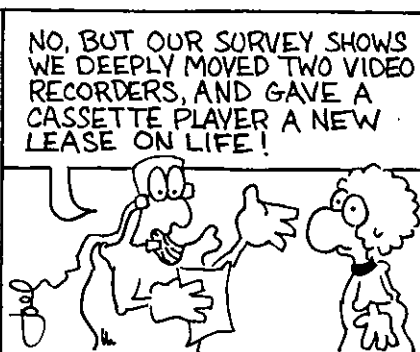
proselytizing more church members? Do its projects address the root causes of injustice? Or do they in effect support the status quo?

Several good tools are available to help investigate voluntary service. One of the best is a book entitled *Volunteer* (\$6.50 postpaid from Inter-cultural Press, Box 768, Yarmouth, Maine 04096). The 1984 edition lists over 160 organizations that sponsor voluntary-service programs of one sort or another. Each entry includes a short description of the agency and a summary of its programs and requirements. The book also contains a helpful index on opportunities for disabled volunteers.

*Volunteer!* looks very similar to another book called *Invest Yourself*. Both are purportedly published by the Commission on Voluntary Service and Action, a loose coalition of church and social-service organizations formed in 1945 to promote volunteerism. But according to published reports (see for example, "How the Revolutionaries Conned the Bureaucrats," *The Christian Century*, July 20-27, 1983), this commission was co-opted in the late 1970s by a minority faction bent on using it to promote a very different agenda. That agenda apparently includes various scams to raise money and, ultimately, the staging of a violent insurrection in the United States.

Subsequently, *Invest Yourself* began to include listing of numerous "volunteer opportunities" which were little more than fronts for this militaristic group. In response, most of the

### Pontius' Puddle



## JSAC IN ACTION

### 1988 CHURCH COMPUTER CONFERENCE TO BE IN DETROIT AND FEATURE SPECIAL HELP FOR NOVICES

One of JSAC's program units is CAMNET (Computer Applications for Ministry Network), of which 16 denominations in the United States and Canada are members thus far. CAMNET, among other things, sponsors an annual "Computer Applications for Ministry Conference" (CAMCON). CAMCON 1 was held in Los Angeles in 1986 and CAMCON 2 in Atlanta in April, 1987.

The CAMNET management committee, meeting in New York on June 1, took action to make the Detroit area (including Windsor, Ontario, across the Detroit River) the site for CAMCON 3. While CAMCON 1 and 2 were in Lent, CAMCON 3 will be after Lent and before summer, avoiding dates selected for major denominational national assemblies.

Sites for subsequent CAMCONs were also targeted as follows:

- 1989 - CAMCON 4, Seattle
- 1990 - CAMCON 5, Toronto
- 1991 - CAMCON 6, Kansas City

The registration fee will be \$120—but only \$60 for members of CAMNET member communions who register a month or more before the event.

Although the post-conference evaluation forms for CAMCON 2 showed that 97% of the approximately 400 participants rated the event in positive terms (77% very positive), CAMCON leaders are sure they can make CAMCON 3 even more helpful and noteworthy. For example, CAMCON 2 had a "Square One Basics" workshop for novices, but the novices wanted even more help. They found it in the "interest group" periods. Ruth Johnson from Seattle and Dave Baumgart from Summersville, S.C., held a large group of novices enthralled while they "took apart" the components of a computer system (on newsprint) and described what goes on inside a computer using down-to-earth comparisons such as what goes on in storing books on library shelves. Ruth Johnson has already been tagged as a resource person to lead a series of Square 1, Square 2, Square 3 workshops at CAMCON 3 for novices.

Help will be given not only in understanding how computers work, but in helping individuals and churches make decisions about choosing their first computer, software, printers, etc., making decisions based on cost effectiveness that could help save hundred of dollars in each case.

The CAMNET committee also affirmed the need for more specialized "courses" and seminars for non-novices.

The CAMNET management committee is headed by Robert Tomlinson (PCUSA), and its other members are: Al Fifhouse (UMC), Alice Foster (UCCanada), Charles Cooper (UCC), Paul Milner, (ELCA), Louis Meyer (COG-Anderson), Fred Howard (EC), Tom Frommer (CC-DOC), John DeBoer (JSAC). Tom Frommer also serves as chair of the CAMCON 3 program planning committee, which comprises a number of other persons, each a well-known authority in a particular field of expertise.

If you attended CAMCON 1 or CAMCON 2 you will automatically be sent detailed information about CAMCON 3. If you did not, and want to have your

name placed on the mailing list to receive such information, write to the JSAC office making this specific request in your letter. And if you are a member or officer of a communion that has not yet joined CAMNET, write for information about how your communion may join, sponsor CAMCON 3, and thus make all its members eligible for the 50% discount on the CAMCON registration fee.

Communions currently members of CAMNET are: American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (through the ALC and LCA predecessors), Church of the Brethren, Christian Church-Disciples of Christ, Church of God-Anderson, Cumberland Presbyterian, Episcopal, Evangelical Covenant Church of America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church in Canada, Reformed Church in America, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church. A modest financial commitment (between \$100 and \$500 based on size of communion) and a commitment to publicize CAMCON 3 in denominational publications makes a communion a CAMCON 3 sponsor and its members eligible for the discount.

### TRAINING EVENTS SCHEDULED BY INTERFAITH CONCILIATION CENTER

ICC, a subsidiary of the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice, has scheduled training events in New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. These are in response to the most common question ICC gets. People call or write wondering where they can learn more about responding to conflicts they find themselves involved in or spectators to.

Although ICC was established primarily to serve as a networking and referral resource, its leaders have decided to hold these training workshops to help people develop skills in the area of mediation.

"Few people in the religious community seem to know or care about mediation as a skill for peace-making and justice-doing," says John Horner-Ibler, ICC's staff person. He says that while more mediators and trainers are entering the field every year, their visibility, and that of the alternative dispute resolution movement, remains low in most religious bodies. "ICC wants to change that," he said.

The workshops will be held:

**April 27 and May 11**, Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, New York;

**June 8 and June 9**, Pendle Hill Retreat Center, Wallingford, PA;

**June 11 and June 12**, Pacific Lutheran Seminary, Berkeley, CA.

Registration for a workshop is \$75 including materials and lunch. For detailed information write: The Rev. John Horner-Ibler, Interfaith Conciliation Center, 199 North Columbus Ave., Mount Vernon, NY 10553.







original commission members withdrew their support of *Invest Yourself* and began publishing *Volunteer!* instead. People we know and trust who are well acquainted with the controversy say that *Invest Yourself* is no longer a reliable directory of reputable service organizations. Our suggestion is to steer clear of *Invest Yourself* and rely instead on *Volunteer!*

Another valuable book is *The Response* (\$5.00 postpaid from International Liaison, 1234 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20005). Like *Volunteer!* it lists and describes dozens of voluntary-service programs. The book's publisher, International Liaison, also operates a referral service that can help match you with a voluntary agency. International Liaison is an affiliate of the U.S. Catholic Conference, but it operates interdenominationally in its recruitment and referrals.

Intercristo (Box 33487, Seattle, Wash. 98133) is another organization providing referral services. Its extensive computer files can match people with jobs in Christian missions and agencies around the world. Most of these openings are paid positions for people seeking careers, but some are for volunteers.

Two other resources are likewise

not geared specifically for volunteering but may provide you with further leads. *Good Works* (\$16.00 postpaid from Dembner Books, 80 Eighth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011) is a hefty directory of six hundred social change organizations, many of which accept volunteers or interns. Each month *Community Jobs* magazine (1520 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20036; \$12.00 per year) lists current job openings with various community and social-justice groups across the United States. Again, some of the listed positions are for interns or volunteers.

Each of these resources can give you some idea of what voluntary service is like. But you'll never understand volunteering completely from reading a book. In fact, you probably won't really understand it until sometime after you've begun your assignment—sometime when you least expect it.

In a hot and dusty African village, the weekly breakfast distribution was running late again. Its hurried pace never left much room for personal contact with the street boys and beggars who lined up to receive food. So many hungry mouths to feed! On this morning, the young volunteer didn't even have time to open each can of sardines being

handed out with the yogurt and bread.

So why had the line now shuffled to a halt? Why was that lone woman holding everything up, apparently refusing to open her own can? And whatever was she mumbling about?

The volunteer went over to her and glanced down at her upturned hands. The woman was a leper. She had no fingers to open her can of sardines.

When their eyes met again the woman was smiling warmly, her face on the edge of shy laughter, encouraging the volunteer to see the wry humor that was the strength of her painful life. There on that dusty African street these two human beings shared a marvelous moment of recognition.

Certainly volunteering is about agencies and policies and projects and programs. But it is also about small moments such as this that move people, change them, that will remain long after a passport has expired back home in the bottom of a dresser drawer.

Philip Harnden, a staff writer for *The Other Side*, also does free-lance writing—with his sleeves rolled down. This article is an excerpted from the January-February issue.

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