A week-long reflection guide for family, friends, and supporters of Service & Justice Trips participants
Creighton University
Service & Justice Trips

This Spring Break we have 133 students making a grand journey; They are going on a Service & Justice Trip to one of 18 host communities across the country. These communities are opening their arms, their hearts, and their lives, to welcome the Creighton students, to serve alongside them, and to help them immerse themselves into the local culture. Over the last 30 years of Service & Justice Trips, countless students have been transformed by these experiences, but we have never had an opportunity for parents, family members, and supporters to reflect like the students over the course of the week. This year, we have put together a reflection book for those who aren’t going on a trip. This book has a reflection for each day based around the seven pillars that structure our program (service, solidarity, justice, community, simplicity, sustainability, and reflection), as well as a reflection on gratitude and one on joy. We hope you enjoy your week and we thank you for being a supporter of the Service & Justice Trips program.

Peace,

Jeff Peak
Assistant Director
Creighton Center for Service and Justice
One of the seven pillars of the Service & Justice Trips Program is reflection. Each night, all the groups will participate in various types of reflection activities as a chance to take a moment in order to process the sights, sounds, and experiences from the day. Though this book of REFLECTIONS isn’t exactly the same, hopefully it will help you go on your own JOURNEY, PILGRIMAGE as our students do the same. When you think about it, these experiences are more than trips. Yes, they are for SERVICE. Yes, they are trips. Hopefully, though, they will empower students to open their HEARTS TO GOD, however they call GOD, and as we pray and reflect with them, allow us to do the same.

On the S&JTs, we ask students to pack simply, leaving tests, studies, books, even phones, and iPads, at home. For it is in emptying our HEARTS of things we do not need to carry with us, and praying to GOD to OPEN OUR HEARTS to the lives, hopes, dreams, realities of the HOST COMMUNITIES that TRANSFORMATION occurs. TRANSFORMATION doesn’t happen all at once. It is a process and happens over a lifetime.

What is TRANSFORMATION? It is a new heart, new mind, new perspective, even new behaviors for some people. It is a GIFT given to us when we LOVE others and let their REALITY TOUCH OUR HEARTS. It happens when we are in SOLIDARITY with others, when we allow others’ lives to seep into our own and we can feel a KINSHIP with them.

On their PILGRIMAGE, SERVICE TRIP, JOURNEY, each student will meet people who will stretch them: their ideas, their preconceived pictures of life, their ideals, and their values. When the students return, the stories they bring with them will call and challenge us the same way. Some of the folks students meet will touch them so deeply, they will be able to say and feel “I feel one with you.” SOLIDARITY.

Our JOURNEYS are made of questions, finding some answers, looking at deeper questions. This is where COMMUNITY comes in. We are called to SERVICE, TO BUILD JUST STRUCTURES, with others in COMMUNITY. Students will meet new communities in their journeys. They will form COMMUNITY with your team members. You will face and reflect on a myriad of questions alone and together. We’ll do the same. We form a COMMUNITY of individuals who are reflecting on the S&JT experiences just as students will be doing.

SUSTAINABILITY, when you think of it, has a lot to do with COMMUNITY. By using things lightly, respecting all of life, the earth, our peoples, the universe, our resources, we not only live more simply, but also as a better global neighbor in COMMUNITY. It is a choice: to RESPECT and REVERENCE ALL OF LIFE, to perhaps use less and share more. It is looking to the future with an eye to all on the planet and wanting a planet for those to come.

SERVICE and JUSTICE or a FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE: The experiences students have this week will lead them to many questions, but we can ponder as well. Some questions have been asked for centuries: “why am I here with these people? What do they have to teach me? Why can’t he/she do this for him/herself? If I am just BEING PRESENT, how is this serving anyone? We have laws to protect these people. Why aren’t they using them? Won’t we ever be without poor people? Won’t we ever have PEACE...OR JUSTICE? Where is the CHURCH (Catholic, Christian, Islam, Hebrew, Jain, B’hai, etc? etc? etc?)”

All of this says you have an exciting JOURNEY ahead of you. It may not be as exciting as actually getting to visit a host community on a trip of your own, but we hope that this week of reflection is a suitable substitute.
In the Service of Life

In recent years the question how can I help? has become meaningful to many people. But perhaps there is a deeper question we might consider. Perhaps the real question is not how can I help? but how can I serve?

Serving is different from helping. Helping is based on inequality; it is not a relationship between equals. When you help you use your own strength to help those of lesser strength. If I’m attentive to what’s going on inside of me when I’m helping, I find that I’m always helping someone who’s not as strong as I am, who is needier than I am. People feel this inequality. When we help we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity and wholeness. When I help I am very aware of my own strength. But we don’t serve with our strength, we serve with ourselves. We draw from all of our experiences. Our limitations serve, our wounds serve, even our darkness can serve. The wholeness in us serves the wholeness in others and the wholeness in life. The wholeness in you is the same as the wholeness in me. Service is a relationship between equals.

Helping incurs debt. When you help someone they owe you one. But serving, like healing, is mutual. There is no debt. I am as served as the person I am serving. When I help I have a feeling of satisfaction. When I serve I have a feeling of gratitude. These are very different things.

Serving is also different from fixing. When I fix a person I perceive them as broken, and their brokenness requires me to act. When I fix I do not see the wholeness in the other person or trust the integrity of the life in them. When I serve I see and trust that wholeness. It is what I am responding to and collaborating with.

The pictures throughout this reflection book were taken on past Fall and Spring Break Service & Justice Trips.
There is distance between ourselves and whatever or whomever we are fixing. Fixing is a form of judgment. All judgment creates distance, a disconnection, an experience of difference. In fixing there is an inequality of expertise that can easily become a moral distance. We cannot serve at a distance. We can only serve that to which we are profoundly connected, that which we are willing to touch. This is Mother Teresa’s basic message. We serve life not because it is broken but because it is holy.

If helping is an experience of strength, fixing is an experience of mastery and expertise. Service, on the other hand, is an experience of mystery, surrender and awe. A fixer has the illusion of being causal. A server knows that he or she is being used and has a willingness to be used in the service of something greater, something essentially unknown. Fixing and helping are very personal; they are very particular, concrete and specific. We fix and help many different things in our lifetimes, but when we serve we are always serving the same thing. Everyone who has ever served through the history of time serves the same thing. We are servers of the wholeness and mystery in life.

The bottom line, of course, is that we can fix without serving. And we can help without serving. And we can serve without fixing or helping. I think I would go so far as to say that fixing and helping may often be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul. They may look similar if you’re watching from the outside, but the inner experience is different. The outcome is often different, too.

Our service serves us as well as others. That which uses us strengthens us. Over time, fixing and helping are draining, depleting. Over time we burn out. Service is renewing. When we serve, our work itself will sustain us.

Service rests on the basic premise that the nature of life is sacred, that life is a holy mystery which has an unknown purpose. When we serve, we know that we belong to life and to that purpose. Fundamentally, helping, fixing and service are ways of seeing life. When you help you see life as weak, when you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. From the perspective of service, we are all connected: All suffering is like my suffering and all joy is like my joy. The impulse to serve emerges naturally and inevitably from this way of seeing. Lastly, fixing and helping are the basis of curing, but not of healing. In 40 years of chronic illness I have been helped by many people and fixed by a great many others who did not recognize my wholeness. All that fixing and helping left me wounded in some important and fundamental ways. Only service heals.


We are all invited to serve others through our Baptism as Christians or initiation in other faiths or our good hearts; the desire to serve is still a GIFT. It is meant to be received and given away.

In Mt 3:13-17 Jesus hears, “This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”

God says that to each of us. YOU are God's beloved son or daughter.

In the book Tattoos on the Heart by Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ, we read: “The poet Kabir asks, ‘What is God?’ Then he answers his own question: ‘God is the breath inside the breath.’”

And later in Tattoos on the Heart: “Behold the One beholding you and smiling”.

This breath inside of you, and you, and you and me, smiles as we give ourselves in Service to one another.

Listen to others' needs and listen to your heart as you are attending to another.

Do you hear helping and fixing or service?
Robi Damelin has always fought injustice. Growing up in South Africa, she spoke out against apartheid and worked actively for co-existence. In 1967, she moved to Israel—“to solve the conflict,” she says with self-deprecating humor. She ended up working on a kibbutz. “Ever since then,” she told me, “I have had a love-hate relationship with this country.” She loves the reality of a homeland for the Jewish people, but she hates the oppression of Palestinian people that results from the Israeli military occupation. “Israel will never be free until the Palestinians are free,” she says.

Robi’s son, David, shared her perspective about the occupation. Robi claims he “would rather have gone to jail than serve in the military, but he knew that as soon as he was released, he’d just be posted somewhere else. In the end we agreed it would be better for him to serve as an officer and set an example to other soldiers by behaving like a human being.” David fulfilled his required service, but in 2002 he was called up to the reserves. Again, he and Robi decided he should serve and set an example. But as a soldier “he was a symbol of an occupying army.” On March 3, 2002, 28-year-old David Damelin was killed by a Palestinian sniper.

“I was beside myself with grief,” says Robi. “I had all the good things in life, but it all became totally irrelevant. I just wanted to prevent other families from experiencing this.” Robi was invited to a meeting where she met Palestinian mothers who had also lost children. “I saw there was no difference in our pain. I realized that through our joint pain we could speak out and make a difference.”

Robi closed her public relations business and became a spokesperson for The Parents Circle (www.theparentscircle.com), a group of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost an immediate family member in the conflict. Robi spends her time traveling the world to spread the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace.

“Reconciliation is not about hugging and eating hummus. It is about understanding the needs of the other,” Robi explains. “You need to view history through the human eye.” Together, members of the Parents Circle study each other’s personal and historical narratives. During a typical learning experience, they visited Yad Vashem (the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem), listened to lectures by Israeli and Palestinian historians, then visited an Arab village destroyed by Israelis in 1948.

At the village, one Palestinian mother saw the well she had used as a child. “That helped me understand why she walks around with the key to her family’s house, wishing she could return,” said Robi. “These experiences create empathy.”

In 2010, an Israeli marketing firm challenged creative thinkers throughout the world to come up with a way to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. The result was Blood Relations (www.bloodrelations.org), which provides a catalyst for dialogue by demonstrating people’s shared humanity through the common bond of blood. The effort was launched in Tel Aviv in September 2011, when Israeli and Palestinian members of the Parents Circle publicly donated their blood to Israeli and Palestinian hospitals as a symbolic act of healing. Robi donated her blood while seated next to a Palestinian mother whose son had also been killed.

“The pain of David’s death never goes away,” says Robi. “But what do you do with this pain? Do you invest it in revenge, or do you think creatively?”

People ask why I have hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. How can I not have hope when there are people like Robi Damelin?

Lynne Hybels is co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. Robi Damelin’s story is documented in the film Encounter Point (www.justvision.org/encounterpoint).
The pain of losing a son or daughter is excruciating. It never goes away. A common parental cry is, “s/he wasn’t supposed to die before me”. From great pain can come great acts of love, as in the article about Israeli activist and Mother, Robi Damelin. Her experience of being a Woman of Faith and a grieving mother who had lost her son to war, led her to be and work with grieving Palestinian mothers. They reach out in Solidarity with others around the world spreading the message of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.

SOLIDARITY is an attitude born of likeness or “how much we have in common”. SOLIDARITY results often in behaviors and actions that reach out to others:

“How does Robi Damelin's story strike you? Does her life touch yours? How? The quote from our Cleveland Participant: does it speak to your heart? How? How is your heart feeling in SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS NOW AND WITH WHOM????

AND ASK THESE QUESTIONS AGAIN ON DAY 6!!!
The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education

By: Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ

Today’s predominant ideology reduces the human world to a global jungle whose primordial law is the survival of the fittest. Students who subscribe to this view want to be equipped with well-honed professional and technical skills in order to compete in the market and secure one of the relatively scarce fulfilling and lucrative jobs available. This is the success that many students (and parents!) expect.

All American universities, ours included, are under tremendous pressure to opt entirely for success in this sense. But what our students want - and deserve - includes but transcends this “worldly success” based on marketable skills. The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become.

For four hundred and fifty years, Jesuit education has sought to educate “the whole person” intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually. But in the emerging global reality, with its great possibilities and deep contradictions, the whole person is different from the whole person of the Counter-Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, or the 20th Century. Tomorrow’s “whole person” cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world.

Tomorrow’s whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity. We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to “educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world.” Solidarity is learned through “contact” rather than through “concepts,” as the Holy Father said recently at an Italian university conference. When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity, which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.

Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed. Campus ministry does much to foment such intelligent, responsible and active compassion, compassion that deserves the name solidarity.

Our universities also boast a splendid variety of in-service programs, outreach programs, insertion programs, off-campus contacts and hands-on courses. These should not be too optional or peripheral, but at the core of every Jesuit university’s program of studies.

Our students are involved in every sort of social action - tutoring drop-outs, demonstrating in Seattle, serving in soup kitchens, promoting pro-life, protesting against the School of the Americas - and we are proud of them for it. But the measure of Jesuit universities is not what our students do but who they become and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in future towards their neighbor and their world. For now, the activities they engage in, even with much good effect, are for their formation. This does not make the university a training camp for social activists. Rather, the students need close involvement with the poor and the marginal now, in order to learn about reality and become adults of solidarity in the future.
There is a story told, now quite famous within social justice circles:

Once there was a town built just beyond the bend of a large river. One day some of the children from the town were playing beside the river when they noticed three bodies floating in the water. They ran for help and the townsfolk quickly pulled the bodies out of the river.

One person was dead so they buried that one. One was alive, but very sick, so they put that person in the hospital. The third turned out to be a healthy child, who they placed with a family that cared for the child and took the child to school.

From that day forward, a number of bodies came floating down the river and every day, the good people of the town would pull them out and tend to them—taking the sick to the hospital, placing children with families, and burying those who were dead.

This went on for years. Each week brought its quota of bodies, and the townsfolk not only came to expect a number of bodies each week, but developed more elaborate systems for picking them out of the river and tending to them. Some even gave up their jobs so they could devote themselves to this work full-time. The townspeople began to even feel a certain healthy pride in their generosity and care for them.

However, during all those years and despite all their generosity, nobody thought to go up the river, beyond the bend that hid from sight what was above them, and find out why all those bodies kept floating down the river.

The people the students are meeting during their Service & Justice Trips may be caught in systems that are unjust. It is keeping them from living the equality and justice we profess as Americans.

What do you see as struggles and sufferings that keep them from living their dreams? Are there structures that keep them down that can be changed? Can you advocate for them?

Sometimes we are with others and see their plight and have to leave them without lasting changes in their lives. How can you tell yourself “this is life...this isn't fair...life isn't fair...there are just some things I cannot do” and it is okay?

Mother Teresa said: “We can do no great things. We can only do small things with great love.”
“To look at the word, “Community,” one might think it is a noun. It is actually a verb, in the sense that community requires action. Without people doing something – the building of community, there is no community.

Christian community is intentional, interactive, labor intensive, and action-oriented.

It requires love, joy, generosity, support of the mission and trust.

Community is not a static noun. It is an active verb!

Sr. Monika Ellis, OSB

Sister Monika’s words give a good picture of the essence of COMMUNITY.

Think of 2 communities you have belonged to in your life. How were they different, how the same?

How did these communities shape you?
Excerpt: “I Have a Dream”

By: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of “interposition” and “nullification” -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low; the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim’s pride, From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

How big is your idea of COMMUNITY? Can it grow to encompass a world? A new world of people to visit, to serve? Through your week please reflect on COMMUNITY. Is your idea...experience of COMMUNITY growing...or not?
Tuesday, March 12: SIMPLICITY

Excerpt: A Sacred Voice is Calling

By: John Neafsy

The point is not just to waste less money on unnecessary food and “stuff” that we don’t really need but rather to be ever-mindful that people all over the world are desperately in need of our help at every moment. And the implication is so that we should use the money we save to help the poor, to give it away to people who need it more than we do. Arthur Simon, one of the founders of Bread for the World, presents a number of thoughtful and compelling arguments for what he calls “scaling back”:

There are several arguments to be made in favor of scaling back. The first is that it is simply better for us. It can mean reduced stress, less rushing, fewer distractions, more time with friends and family, a chance to refocus life on things that matter... A second case to be made for simpler living is that it is kinder to God’s creation... A third argument... is that living simply may enable people who are barely surviving to live. Simpler living does that, however, only if you transfer resources to people whose lives are at risk. Eating less and spending less on food, for example, might be good for your health... But cutting back isn’t going to feed anyone unless, say, you contribute the amount saved to a food bank, a relief or development agency, or a group advocating for hungry people.

Throwing in our lot with the poor will cost us in one way or another. If we take the option for the poor seriously, it will cost us financially because we will be continually challenged to think of creative ways to transfer resources to people who need them much more than we do. We are called to “put our money where our mouth is.” This is only fair, because according to the biblical vision of justice, we are actually just giving back to the poor what didn't really belong to us in the first place.

What is simplicity?

Life can get complex. Sometimes we need to strip away some of that complexity in order to remember what is truly important. Focusing on simplicity allows us to reconnect with what is essential. Simplicity can mean refraining from excessive material consumption. Simplicity can also mean refraining from other “stuff” that gets in the way of hearing our true selves and God: television, music, busy-ness. Finally, simplicity can mean doing something such as taking a walk in nature. Simplicity is not poverty, which is always degrading and dehumanizing. Through simplicity, participants can explore and question how their own lifestyles are connected to and interdependent with the lives of others. By living simply, we also create a more sustainable way of life. Using fewer resources, creating less demand for consumer goods, recycling and reusing all contribute to a more sustainable life for our planet.

Why Simplicity?

By removing the “stuff” that can often create barriers between one another, we are able to make steps toward solidarity. We cannot experience and understand the plight of poverty completely, but we can get a taste of its reality. Simplicity also brings freedom; more time for new experiences and more resources for each other. During this week, reflect on what simplicity frees you from and what it can free you for.

How am I experiencing SIMPLICITY this week? Is it a value I can aspire to live? Why would I bother to try to live more simply especially in our “must have it” world?
“Love all God’s creation. If you love everything, you will perceive the Divine Mystery in All Things, and you will come at last to love the Whole World with and All-Embracing Love.”

Finding God in All Things by Fyodor Dostoevsky

The Southern Nevada Water Authority maintains it is only seeking water that is “unused” in the aquifers and that not having a reliable long-term water supply could cause a 10 percent drop in the metropolitan Las Vegas economy—the equivalent of losing 80,000 jobs. The National Parks Conservation Association, Great Basin Water Network, and new allies such as the Mormon Church argue that a pipeline will cause irreparable harm to the environment and that taking a $15-billion bet on poorly studied aquifers is a risky gamble, even for Vegas. Nevada’s state engineer is expected to make a decision on Spring Valley by March, and the hearings for Snake Valley have yet to be scheduled. Although the future of water resources surrounding Great Basin National Park hangs in a delicate balance—much like the Great Basin itself—one thing is certain: This unlikely coalition of conservationists, rural ranchers, small business owners, and American Indians won’t stop fighting.

“It has been a tumultuous journey,” declared Madeline Greymountain, “but we are warriors, and we will keep moving forward. I promise.”

Kevin Grange is a freelance writer in California. His first travel memoir, Beneath Blossom Rain, was published in April.

“In a world of limited resources, refraining from over-consumption, allows for a more SUSTAINABLE way of living for our planet. By limiting our consumption, we actively participate in the protection of precious resources by decreasing the demand. SUSTAINABLE development ‘meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’”


Water is a hot topic in the world whether it is in the U.S.: Nevada, Louisiana, Colorado, Nebraska, etc. or in Europe or Asia or the Artic and more. When we watch what happens with floods like those caused recently by Hurricane Sandy or drought presently felt in hot spots of the U.S. we can see that the present use of water will affect the future of our lands and peoples.

Water is one of many SUSTAINABLE topics along with land, forests, mining, natural resources, foods and crops, etc. This is a great time, as you travel to different parts of the U.S. or are in Omaha, to ponder:

What are SUSTAINABILITY hot topics you are encountering? How are they being struggled with by the people in your community? How are you struggling with them?
WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection is about placing our experiences in dialogue with where we make meaning, such as our faith traditions and family and culture. Through reflection we hope participants can integrate their immersion experiences with the rest of their lives. We provide times for reflection and prayer, respectful and appreciative of diverse backgrounds. Each evening the group gathers for an hour or so to reflect on the day’s experiences. Many participants find this activity to be the most rewarding of the week. Our model of reflection on Service Trips follows the praxis spiral.

First we ask “WHAT?” What happened today...What did you notice...what did you see, hear, and feel?

Next we ask “SO WHAT?” Why does this happen...who has power...who is affected...what does my faith tradition and value system say about what is happening here?

Last, we ask, “NOW WHAT?” What am I going to do differently...how has my view of the world been changed...how can we effect change in our communities?

WHY REFLECTION?

During our Service Trips, we encounter new people, places, social realities and ways of looking at our world. Without taking time to reflect on these experiences, it can be difficult to make sense of the questions that arise. By spending time each evening reflection on our experience, at least three things often happen. First, reflection enriches and deepens our experience. Second, reflection, especially in community, helps us gain new insight...and it helps build community. Third, reflection enables us to move forward, to see differently, and to make new choices for a better world.
Reflection: Going Deeper
Social Analysis: Moving from description, to understanding, to action

This is a great tool to use with your group. There are two different ways to use this:

1. You may want to ask the “What” (Describe) Questions early in the week, “So What” (Interpret) Questions in the middle of the week, and “Now What” (Apply) Questions at the end of the week.

2. Or, you can focus on one service site, and ask “What, So What, Now What” Questions during one reflection evening.

What? (Describe)
Describe the experience: the facts, substance of group interaction, what happened, with whom?
- What surprised you about the service site?
- Describe the people, the location, your interactions etc.
- Describe an event/person that stands out in your mind.

So What? (Interpret)
Interpret the experience: its meaning, feelings involved, lessons learned, “why?”
- How was your service addressing the social issue?
- What did you learn from the experience? How were you different when you left than when you entered?
- How are you similar/different from the people at the site?
- How did the service challenge your assumptions/stereotypes?

Now What? (Apply)
Apply the experience: Contextualize the experience (place the situation in the “big picture”), apply lessons learned/insights gained, set future goals, and create an action plan.
- What policies/laws impact this agency/population/issue?
- What else could be done to address the issue(s) (by individuals, groups, agencies, society?)
- How can this experience apply to other aspects of your life?
- What are the root causes of this social issue?
- Where do we go from here? What’s the next step?

- Jennifer Reed-Bouley, PhD, College of St. Mary
Friday, March 13: Gratitude

St. Ignatius of Loyola taught his Jesuit Fathers and Brothers to reflect at least 3 times a day... to do a CONSCIOUSNESS EXAMEN on their day. The following article gives a form of this process.

Excerpt: Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life

By: Dennis and Matt Linn and Shelia Frabricant Linn

The examen is simple, it is about asking ourselves two questions: For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful? These questions help us identify moments of consolation and desolation. For centuries, prayerful people have found direction for their life by identifying these moments.

I first discovered the power of these two questions twenty-five years ago, when I taught on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation. I had just moved into a housing project and I decided to risk something new: inviting guests for a meal. I invited eight of my students to dinner. Since the most common meal on the reservation is soup, I spent the morning boiling soup bones. Then I added a cupful of rice. It seemed to disappear. The same thing happened when I added the entire box of rice. Not knowing rice expands as it cooks, I went to four different neighbors and collected about two more boxfuls of rice. (Unfortunately for me, Sioux are very generous and give without asking any questions...) With three boxes of rice in the kettle, I hoped I would have enough for eight hungry students if I first filled them up with plenty of bread. Questioning the wisdom of inviting so many people for dinner, I left the soup on the stove to simmer and headed over to school for class.

When I returned home with the students, the rice met us at the front door. The inside of my house looked as though a foot of snow had fallen. While some students stayed to help me shovel rice, others headed out to invite their families and friends to help us eat it. Instead of eight Sioux students, that night I fed most of the inhabitants of the reservation (dogs included). The meal made such a lasting impression that this past year when we gave a retreat on the same reservation the most common question I heard was, “Dennis, do you have any more rice soup?”

I remember the rice soup not just because it launched my cooing career, but also because it began a spiritual practice that is still fundamental to my life. That evening after dinner, not only my students stayed, but also some of their parents, younger brothers and sisters and other teachers. I was so moved by their presence that I forgot the format for the prayer service I had planned and instead simply shared what I felt. Lighting a candle to help me get centered, I told the group I had not felt grateful for the rice that met me at the door when I arrived home. But I was deeply grateful that people of every age were meeting at my home to feast (on the rice!) and to pray. Others began to share their own moments of least gratitude and most gratitude from the day, each one lighting a candle as he or she spoke. God’s will is generally for us to do more of whatever we are most grateful for or whatever gives us most life.

Reflection Questions:

For what are you most grateful today? For what are you least grateful today?
Saturday, March 16:  JOY

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted, and behold, SERVICE WAS JOY’

Rabbinadrath Tagore

Excerpt: Between Heaven and Mirth
By: Fr. Jim Martin, SJ

Saintly humor continues up until modern times. Perhaps the most well-known contemporary example is Blessed Pope John XXIII, who served as pope from 1958 to 1963. His most famous joke came when a journalist innocently asked him, “Your Holiness, how many people work in the Vatican?”

John paused, thought it over, and said, “About half of them.” Someone once asked John about the Italian habit of closing offices in the afternoon. “Your Holiness, we understand that the Vatican is closed in the afternoon, and people don't work then.”

“Ah no!” said the pope. “The offices are closed in the afternoon. People don’t work in the morning!”

Shortly after his election as pope, John was walking in the streets of Rome when a woman passed him and said to her friend, “My God, he’s so fat!”

Overhearing her remark, he turned around and replied, Madame, I trust you understand that the papal conclave is not exactly a beauty contest.”

In the 1940s, when John was still an archbishop and the papal nuncio, or ambassador, in Paris, he was at an elegant dinner party, seated across from a woman wearing a low-cut dress that exposed a good deal of cleavage. Someone turned to him and said, “Your Excellency, what a scandal! Aren't you embarrassed that everyone is looking at that woman?”

And he said, “Oh no, everyone is looking at me, to see if I’m looking at her.” Who couldn’t love a pope who had a sense of humor? Who couldn’t love a man who was so comfortable with himself that he made jokes about his height (which was short), his ears (which were big), and his weight (which was considerable). Born Angelo Roncalli, in the small town of Sotto il Monte, near Bergamo, after he was elected pope he met a little boy named Angelo and exclaimed, “That was my name too!” Then, conspiratorially, “But then they made me change it!”

His humor seemed to flow naturally from his joy. His joy made him comfortable with the absurdities of the world For his openness, generosity, warmth, and humor, “Good Pope John” was loved by many. When he died, a friend of mine was in a cab in Rome driven by a Jewish cab driver. “He was our pope too,” the cab driver said.

There is something irresistible about a person in a position of authority with a self-deprecatory sense of humor. It instantly binds us to the person, perhaps because we see in him or her a reflection of what we could be, of what God wants us to be in the midst of our accomplishments: simple, humble, aware of our own limitations, and of course, joyful!”
Now What?

It’s a question that we ask each Service & Justice Trips participant to answer at the end of their week. Everyone has to answer for him or herself. How am I going to incorporate my experiences from the past week into my daily life?

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

- Anne Frank