



# Vocational Discernment Resources

*Spirituality Retreat Facilitator Packet*

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With additional resources and support from Volunteers Exploring Vocation

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## Introduction to this Resource Packet

Through a generous grant from Volunteers Exploring Vocation, and with the collaboration of Sarah Kinsel, JVC Northwest offers this resource packet as a reference and possible model for infusing vocational discernment into the Spirituality Retreat for Jesuit Volunteers. We offer this resource to our retreat facilitators knowing that you bring your own wisdom and experience to crafting a retreat that invites Jesuit Volunteers to engage Ignatian Spirituality as they reflect on their year and what is yet to come. It includes sessions of varying length, some with multiple activities, as well as guidelines and suggestions for a full retreat agenda.

You do not have to follow the retreat agenda offered here. Individual sessions and activities can be adapted and incorporated into the retreat you are developing. We do ask that you incorporate at least one activity focused specifically on vocational discernment into your retreat (from this resource or of your own design). In addition, we ask that you build into the retreat an FJV panel discussion (or some other conversation format) to share stories and wisdom about exploring vocation. The JVC Northwest staff will be making the arrangements to identify, invite, and support the participation of FJVs for this session.

We hope the JVs leave the retreat with a felt sense of increased trust in their spiritual journey and ability to discern as well as practical tools for making next steps in vocational discernment.

Below is a description of the retreat theme and some hoped-for outcomes and objectives of the vocational discernment component. After that you will find a sample flow of sessions and activities, followed by a description of each activity. We hope these resources will be helpful to your planning.

### **What is the Spirituality Retreat?**

All JVs go on three retreats a year, and our third retreat focuses on spirituality. This retreat provides the opportunity for JVs to explore the balance between their internal spiritual reflection and the ways they live out their beliefs. In looking back at the past nine months of their year, they will seek to understand the relationship between their spirituality and living a life committed to social and ecological justice. The Ignatian tools of discernment, the Examen, and silent reflection will be used to examine the service they are doing at their respective placements and the relationships they have formed in community. Volunteers will spend time reflecting on their own vocational discernment as part of their spiritual journey. They will also be encouraged to consider how to continue to put their beliefs into action in the world after completing their time as a JV.

### **Vocational Discernment Outcomes Guide - Third Retreat Curriculum and Resource Development**

The developers of these sessions worked from certain goals and assumptions for what the JVs would do during the sessions, and what they would be prepared to do on returning to their locales. Below you can see our:

- Assumptions - the roles that JVs will play throughout their lives related to vocational discernment and spirituality
- Goals for the sessions - objectives, and
- Goals for what JVs will be able to do upon returning to the “real world” after the retreat - outcomes.

If you have other activities or retreat sessions in mind that would satisfy these assumptions and goals, we welcome your developing your own session plans for the JVs, to help them focus at least some of their third retreat time on vocational discernment.

## **Roles**

*What functions will JVs be able to play as a result of the retreat and resources?*

- Most authentic, wisest self
- Career/vocational steward
- Compassionate sojourner with other JVs and with others

## **Outcomes**

*What does the JV need to be able to DO, out in the REAL WORLD, as a result of the retreat and resources?*

1. Hear their inner voice / Listen for God's calling for them
  - Maintain a practice that connects them to God/the Divine
  - Increase self-trust, trust in a greater (divine) wisdom
2. Rely on trusted resource people (e.g., mentors) in their lives
3. Own the sense of vocation or purpose in life, even if they haven't identified it yet
4. Make choices for their next /future steps that feel right for them
5. Hold vocation discernment lightly; maintain a playful or experimental or curious attitude towards the future, within a feeling of safety. If vocational discernment is a series of trial & error experiments, maintain a sense of adventure: "What will be my next experiment?"
  - Manage their own expectations around what "career" means - it's not one path wrapped up in a bow that you open on August 1st (first day as an FJV).
  - Let go of self-judgment related to where they are in the discernment process or vocational journey
6. Hold clients and peers in the same light of dignity and highest calling and high expectations as they hold for themselves

## Objectives

*What can the JV do during the retreat to show us that they can achieve the outcomes after the retreat?*

- Given several specific discernment practices, identify 2-4 that work for them individually and share those in a small group [possible activities for building awareness of your inner voice - physical life/yoga, breathing/meditation, examen, etc.] [Connects to Outcome 1]
- Given a resource for cultivating relationships with resource people, list 3-5 people they want to reach out to, for a conversation related to vocational discernment (either the JV's, or the resource person's)[possible activity: Who has helped you get to where you are today? What attributes do they have? Who do you already know who could guide you on your path?] [Connects to Outcome 2]
- Articulate a vocational question they are holding during the retreat [Connects to Outcome 3]
- Identify which past decisions have felt right up until now [possible activity: think/share] [Connects to Outcome 4]
- Create a working image/metaphor for the path that facilitates trust and safety in their journey, and that encourages them to deepen their engagement in the journey [Connects to Outcome 5]
- Enjoy the company of other JVs/retreatants: support others on retreat; feel safe in this company and with the questions they are holding [Connects to Outcomes 5, 6]

### **Logistical Suggestions:**

Some ideas that may be helpful in retreat planning

- Pre-assign small groups of four and have JVs meet in the same groups all weekend, except for focus group conversation.
- Create times of observed quiet - perhaps a mealtime, or a free-time, or early mornings... or perhaps there is a physical space in the retreat facility that can be designated 'quiet space' for those wanting extended reflection.
- If feasible, consider keeping Saturday afternoon as entirely free time, with a Saturday evening session instead of an afternoon session.

## Sample Retreat Outline

### Session 1: Creating Hospitable Space (1.5 hours)

- Welcome, intros. (10 min)
- Intentions of this retreat (5 min)
- Movement: Checking in with ourselves and with each other, briefly: We are the body this weekend (10 min) *Ice-breaker, game, song, or body prayer.*
- Introduce Listening in discernment (10 min)
- Journaling: Self check-in and what do you bring this weekend (5-8 min)
- Partner check in (5 min)
- Handout/small groups: discussion on practices for creating hospitable space (20 min)
- Examen or other meditation (15-20 min)

### Session 2: Listening to our Lives (2 or 2.5 hours)

#### **Part One: The practice of paying attention**

- Interpretation of theme: Ignatian Spirituality (10 min)
- Partner check in (5 min)
- Meditation walk or journaling (20-30 min)
- Large group discussion: What did you notice? (10 min)

#### **Part Two: Intro to vocation and attending to our life journeys**

- Brainstorming in pairs: What is one thing you know about vocation, and one thing you are curious about? (5 min)
- Large group discussion (10 min)
- Facilitator interpretation of vocation (10 min)
- Listening to our lives art/metaphor activity (45min- 1 hour)



### **Session 3: Choosing our lens: why is vocation important? (2 hours)**

#### **Larger stories that shape our lives (world stories, expectations, God's story[ies])**

- Group Discussion (10 min)
- Brainstorming storylines (15 min)
- Group discussion: What might God's story or stories be? (10)
  
- Small group sharing (30-45)
  - How our lives relate to the bigger stories
  - Opportunity to share from life map/metaphor projects
- Large group reflections (10)
  
- Small group discussion on vocation in real life (20)
- Large group reflections (10)
- Closing meditation or journaling (10)

### **Session 4: Gathering Resources and taking action (2 or 2.5 hours)**

- Opening meditation (10)
- Framing Conversation (10)
- Mapping our resources exercise (15 min)
- Weighted pros and cons list (20)
- Focus Groups discussion (20-30)
- Small group check in and identify one next step (20-30)
- Sharing of intentions and closing (10)

**Additional session/ or to be woven in Saturday or Sunday:  
FJV panel and conversation.**

## Session 1 | Creating Hospitable Space (1.5 hours)

### Objectives:

- As a retreat community, create a shared context and container for the weekend
- JVs will be able to articulate practices for creating hospitable space with themselves and others.

**Materials Needed:** Journals, pens

### SESSION 1 GUIDELINES

**Welcome, introductions.** (10 min)

**Activity A: Intentions of this retreat** (5 min)

*(Sample Language) Welcome... The theme of this retreat is spirituality, specifically vocational discernment in the Ignatian tradition, and we will be spending time exploring our own stories, God's unfolding stor(ies) in the world, and where these stories intersect. We will also explore practices for uncovering our own unique ways of being in the world, our vocations.*

*This retreat is also the last time all of us will be gathered like this, so a big part of the weekend is also being present to each other, enjoying this setting and our community, reflecting on the year that is almost completed.*

*Our hope is that in the sessions, in the small and large group conversations, in the solitude, in the meals, around the edges - that you will get what you need this weekend. It is a retreat. All of life is spiritual life, so whatever you are bringing is just right.*

## Activity B: Movement: (10 min)

Check in with ourselves and with each other, briefly: We are the body this weekend - through ice-breaker, game, song, or body prayer.

### Examples:

#### a) Snapshot.

Have each community make a “snapshot” with their bodies, depicting either a scene from their preparation for/travel to retreat or a common scene from their lives in community.

#### b) Continuum.

(Sample Language) *If you have lots of energy tonight, stand over here in this corner/ if you are wiped out tonight, stand over on this side of the room... Look around, we are the body tonight. If you are feeling extraverted/introverted...if you like to be in charge/if you like to be told what to do... if you like to plan things out well in advance/play by ear at the last minute... if you learn best by doing/ learn by hearing/ learn by watching...if you feel at home at your placement/ like a newcomer or stranger... After each statement, repeat: Look around, this is the body tonight.*

### Activity C: Introduction to listening in discernment (5-10 min)

This is an opportunity to frame listening as a spiritual practice, as a vital part of discernment - and discernment incorporating all of life, not just what we would term as “spiritual.”

*Sample Language: In retreat time, we get to practice slowing down, turning inward, turning towards ourselves, towards each other, towards God. Hospitality with others, hospitality with self. Space to listen and trust our own voice. The hope this weekend is that we will listen deeply, that we will practice hospitality with one another’s stories, and also with ourselves. Offering hospitality - or radical welcome - to our own passions, questions, doubts, and meandering journey is a vital part of the spiritual life. When we attend to and welcome the voices and often competing desires within ourselves, and make space also for quiet and reflection, we make space for wholeness, for growth, for Spirit’s presence.*

**Activity D: Journaling: self check-in (5-8 min)**

*As we arrive in retreat space, in Sabbath space, away from the busy doing and being of our daily lives, what is one question, feeling, or situation you are bringing this weekend that retreat time or discernment practices might give new perspective to? (Not fix or solve, but give perspective). Can you offer that up and let it rest? Record your thoughts in your journal.*

**Turn to someone next to you and share whatever you are comfortable sharing from this (5 min)**

**Activity E: Small Groups: discussion on practices for creating hospitable space (20 min).**

Place JVs into small groups of four; explain that they will meet in the same groups all weekend, as a place to process the material and explore themes together. Pass out the Volunteers Exploring Vocation handout “Touchstones for Creating Hospitable Space” (Handout A).

*(Sample language) Read this aloud in your small group, one person reading each practice. After you have read all the practices, please invite each other to share which one you find yourself most challenged by and which one feels most natural. Other thoughts or musings about any of these? If there is time for more reflection or conversation, please consider: These Touchstones are written for interpersonal sharing... but what changes for you, or what feelings and thoughts come up for you, when you consider turning them towards yourself? Towards those you serve?*

**Regather in large group (2 min.)**

*(Sample language) Any brief insights to share from small groups?*

**Session Closing: Guided Examen or other meditation (15-20 min)**

<b>Session 2   Listening to our Lives</b> (2 or 2.5 hours)
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**Objectives:**

- JVs will identify an image or metaphor that describes their life journey, that helps trust own voice.
- JVs will be able to identify a practice that helps them pay attention to life and feel connected to the present and/or to the Divine.
- JVs will be able to define vocation for themselves and identify moments in life when they have felt “on track” or connected.

**Materials needed:**

Journals, art and/or collage supplies (markers, paper, scissors, glue, magazines), butcher paper/easel or white board and markers

## SESSION 2 GUIDELINES - PART ONE: THE PRACTICE OF PAYING ATTENTION

### **Activity A: Introduction of Ignatian Spirituality (10 minutes):**

(Sample language) *Ignatian spirituality - discernment of spirits. Attending to desires. What if our longings are gifts from God and one of the primary ways with which God communicates with us? Part of discernment is using intuition, quieting our reason, listening to our heart, identifying our values and passions, watching for patterns over time, and tugs of desire...Releasing (as we are able) a need to control outcome. Another part is analytical: bringing all of our resources to bear. Consciously choosing which stories and values we want to center our lives around.*

*Discernment as a spiritual and decision-making practice involves listening for what wants to happen - which acknowledges a larger movement than the logical, or possibly individual, plan or direction. What is the bigger story here? How am I engaging it? Depending on your beliefs, it might mean opening to God's movement or plan, or simply accessing deeper, inner wisdom than linear thought - imagination, desire/passion, core values - discernment is about attending to where inner movement meets outer movement.*

*The hope is that these awareness practices help us develop trust in our evolving hearts and minds and in our ability to navigate the big questions of life with authenticity, led by God. How do you do that? How do you trust your life, connect to source, and so on? What helps you pay attention?*

### **Partner check in (5 minutes)**

(Sample language) *Turn to someone next to you and share: What are one or two activities or practices that help you stay grounded, present, or connected to God?*



## Activity B: Meditation walk or journaling (20-30)

(Sample language) *All of life is spiritual life, worthy of reflection.*

*Discernment begins with attention, with noticing, with opening to the deeper movements in our lives. This next activity is an invitation to practice paying attention. We will spend the next 20-30 minutes in quiet reflection. You may choose to go for a meditation walk, or awareness walk or to sit quietly, or to draw or write in your journal. As we continue to arrive in this weekend discernment space, we open ourselves to the present moment. God is here, in and with our desires and the many actions of the day. Share Handout, "Mindfulness Walk."*

### **Mindfulness Walk**

As you walk or sit outdoors, try to hold your thoughts lightly. You might clear your mind, or turn your attention outward with all of your senses. Feel free to move slowly, or stop. The main task is to open yourself, and to notice, to savor. As you walk or sit, you might ask one or more of these questions:

- What wants my attention?
- Where might Spirit be moving?
- What is being evoked in me, physically or emotionally?
- If something does catch your attention, spend time simply being. Accept what is offered. Interact, listen.

After your time of deep listening and contemplation, you might reflect in your journal about what you experienced; closely describe what you encounter; or use an image as a prompt for free-writing.

### **Re-gather in large group (2 min.)**

### **Large group discussion (10 minutes)**

(Sample Language) *What did you notice?*

## SESSION 2 GUIDELINES - PART TWO: INTRODUCTION TO VOCATION AND ATTENDING TO OUR JOURNEYS

### **Activity C: Exploring the meaning of vocation (25-30)**

#### ***What is vocation? What is vocational discernment?***

We now transition from general awareness practices into beginning to contemplate vocation and vocational discernment practices. We are going to spend some time deepening our understanding of vocation.

#### **Optional: Watch “Vocation 101” video (3min)**

<https://vimeo.com/11661110> or DVD from JVs Exploring Vocation

#### **Brainstorming in pairs (5 min)**

(Sample language) *Find a partner. Share with one another: What is one thing you know about vocation, and one thing you are curious about?*

#### **Brainstorming in large group (10 min)**

Return attention to large group and write group insights on flipchart or whiteboard.

(Sample language) *What do we know about vocation? Questions we have?*

#### **Facilitator interpretation of vocation. (10 min)**

Facilitator, at this point, share your own ideas about vocation. You will likely have your own wisdom to share from your own definitions or personal stories. In addition to those, here are some common ways of thinking about vocation, some of which may be useful to refer to:

- Where our life story meets God’s story
- Where our gifts, talents, and passions meet the world’s needs
- Vocation...from **vocare**, called out.
- Our calls are always evolving, but often have a common theme.

- A Way of being, encompassing all areas of our lives, not just what we do for money.
- An unfolding experiment, with no “endpoint,” no One Right Answer.
- If this year is an experiment, what might your next experiment be?  
“Career” looks so different for us than for our parents and grandparents... most of us will not step into one job for the next 40 years, but rather upwards of a dozen. Which is one reason why it is important to find your grounding, your passion, your way of being... that manifests throughout your life in your various “doings.”
- Not only or not necessarily career, but our way of giving and receiving love.
- We need time to reflect on our lives to discern vocation.
- What if we let go of expectations about getting it figured out, and look around at what we already know, what we already are?

#### **Activity D: Listening to our lives - art/metaphor activity (45min- 1 hour)**

(Sample language) *One way of connecting to our call, our vocation, is by examining: Where are you now? And how did you get there? I invite you now to each spend some time with your own life journey. You can use art, journaling, collage, or a combination of things to meditate on these questions (See Handouts C “Listening to your life” and D “Movie of your Life”). I invite us all to keep silence during this activity.*

*This will take us to the end of our session; I will signal “time” and draw us together briefly, but feel free to come back to this activity in free time or later this weekend to do more with it.*

**Suggestion:** If using this activity on its own, make time at a later point in the retreat for volunteers to share in small groups about their experience with it, or insights they have gained.

(Sample language) *What do you notice now about your creation? Any overarching metaphor, image, question, or theme? What can vocation look like? How do we know it when we see it/feel it?*

## Session 3 | Choosing our lens: Why is vocation important? (2 hours)<sup>1</sup>

### Objectives:

- JVs will identify an image or metaphor that describes their life journey, that helps trust own voice.
- JVs will be able to define vocation for themselves and identify moments in life when they have felt “on track” or connected.

### Materials needed:

Markers, butcher paper, easel, painters’ tape

### SESSION 3 GUIDELINES

**Activity A: Introduction: Larger stories that shape our lives (world stories, expectations, God’s story(ies))**

For this session, the facilitator will need to provide a bit of explanation about “Big Stories,” or “meta” stories. The main focus of this session is to introduce Big Stories, the idea of God’s story, and the opportunity for individuals to reflect on which Big Stories color their view of the world.

*(Sample language from VEV) We’re moving beyond personal stories, family stories, and community stories now, and beginning to talk about the stories that shape us through our culture. While we often begin to tell our story by telling a personal narrative with relevant facts (where you were born, how you grew up), we often forget that the cultural stories going on around us have huge effect on our lives get lives.*

*“Big Stories” might be the story of America, the story of progress, the story of consumerism, etc. Whether we recognize them or not, our lives make up a part of each of these stories, and these stories have an affect on how we live*

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<sup>1</sup> This session adapted from JVs Exploring Vocation retreat activities

*our lives. For instance, living within the story of consumerism might shape our lives in such a way that we find ourselves following the plot line of accumulating things to make ourselves better. Since we live within the story of America, we might cast Americans as the main characters in any international plotline, whether that is true or not.*

*The Big Stories have such power that they bleed into many of the smaller situations a narrative of our lives, and while it is probably impossible to extract yourself from any of these cultural stories, we can become aware of them and their effects on us. Many of you are probably thinking critically about this already. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish which story has the greatest pull in our lives, which is why it is good to name and attempt to understand them.*

#### **Group Discussion (10 min)**

Begin the session with a large group discussion about some of the larger stories that we live in, after explaining the idea of a big story, ask the group what some of the stories are that they are already living with them. You might make a list of these brainstorm stories on an easel.

### **Activity B: Brainstorming storylines (15 min)**

On four large pieces of butcher paper, write titles of four Big Stories that the group named during the discussion. Place one on each of the four walls around the room. Invite JVs to take several minutes to move from one wall to the next, brainstorming the elements of each story: Who are the main characters in the story? What is the setting? How does the plot progress? How does the story end? They should write their ideas on the paper.

### Activity C: What might God's story or stories be? (10 minutes)

Discussion about choosing the narratives that guide our choices.

(Sample language) *We all know these stories we've been discussing on the paper around the room; they are familiar. (Have someone read each 'storyline' quickly)... Now we get a chance to brainstorm what might be the elements of "God's story" for the world... or a story of wholeness or shalom (characters, setting, plot structure).*

(Record ideas on the butcher paper.)

*What comes up for you, as we look at these stories?*

*Serving with people who have such limited choices, as many of you do, begs the question, who am I to "explore vocation?"*

*My question back to you is, "Who are you not to?"*

*Living into vocation is a social justice issue, not just a self-centered pursuit. As we live fully into our gifts in the context of our lives, we do this not for ourselves alone but for God and for the world - for a larger, better story than the narratives that bind and oppress. We have to stand in the tension of contemplation and action and not forget, not get lost in guilt or self-serving: All people have vocation, all people have an essential power and spirit to express. This is a liberating word, a creative word; we are called to live our gifts in ways that nurture the flourishing of all people. How are the people you work with each day teaching you?*



### **Activity D: Small group sharing (30-45 min)**

Gather in same small groups. Have the following questions written on butcher paper for all to see and discuss:

#### **How our lives relate to the bigger stories (20 min)**

Each person gets a few minutes to answer:

- Which of the Big Stories are most influential in your life?
- When you think about your own story, which of these stories does it most closely resemble?
- Which one would you like it to resemble?

#### **Opportunity to share from life map/metaphor projects (20 min)**

(Sample language) *What do you notice now about your creation? Any overarching metaphor, image, question, or theme? What can vocation look like? How do we know it when we see it/feel it?*

**Re-gather in one room, if groups have scattered. Ask participants to remain in small groups. (2 min)**

### Activity E: Small group discussion on vocation in real life (20 min)

Pass around handout of discussion questions, if helpful (Handout E)

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

*You don't have to answer all these questions; they are resources.*

- In the midst of all these stories are real people living with purpose, connected to core values. Who do you know - name one person - who in your eyes is living in vocation. What is it about that person that leads to your belief?
- Now tell about someone you know who does not seem to be living in vocation; what is it about that person that leads you to this conclusion?
- Reflect on the people you have named as living in vocation. How might they be part of God's larger story?
- Thinking back on your Listening to Your Life creations, how does your story connect with God's story as we might know it? Do you see connections in the lives of others in your small group?

### **Large group reflections (10 min)**

Regather attention to the front of the room.

*(Sample language) Any insights or questions from small group you'd like to share with the large group?*

### **Closing meditation or journaling (10 min)**

Display the journal/reflection questions on butcher paper.

*(Sample language) If today gave you one image or metaphor for your journey with vocation, what might it be? What might it have to say to you right now? Take the next ten minutes to write in your journal or reflect on these questions.*

## Session 4 | Gathering Resources and Taking Action

(2 hours)

### Objectives:

- JVs will identify resources for their vocational journey, including (most importantly) personal or community resources, but also perhaps online, print, financial, spiritual, and other resources.
- JVs will name one next step in their process, whether that is an application to fill out, a possible mentor to call, or just naming and owning a central passion or question.
- JVs will demonstrate ownership of their journey with call/vocation through participation in activities; reflection on values; and sharing with peers.

**Materials needed:** Journals, blank sheets of paper, markers

*All the activities in this session are geared towards helping volunteers identify inner resources (values, passions, faith) and outer resources (friends, networks, FJVs, others) which might support their exploration of vocation now or in the future.*

### **SESSION 4 GUIDELINES**

**Opening meditation (10 min)**

Suggestions for opening meditation: Centering meditation; Breath prayer;

Stretching; Envisioning intentions for the day

**Activity A: Framing Conversation (10 min)**

Transition from the context of the whole weekend to these final sessions.

*(Sample language) This weekend we have practiced listening and mindful awareness. We have used our intuition, our creativity, and our dreaming. We have looked analytically at some of the stories that shape us. We are trying to remember to trust ourselves, trust our life, and God's movement within all. Can we take to heart this both-and? Wherever you are is perfect. And, what is the next step? Wherever we find ourselves is just right... and there is always a very next step to take, in the direction of growth and wholeness. Discovering, or choosing, what that is can be simple or daunting.*

*We all face challenges in living our vocations, sometimes in discovering them - it can be a countercultural thing to do in the midst of the world's guiding narratives. We cannot do it in isolation. Let's identify our resources.*

## Activity B: Journaling Questions (10-15 minutes)

JVs journal quietly on their own. Some questions for reflection may include:

- What big or small questions are you wrestling with this weekend?
- What clarity do you have about your vocation at this point in your life?
- If discovering vocation is a series of experiments, what might your next experiment be?

### Activity C: Mapping our Resources (15-20 min)

This is a guided reflection designed to help identify possible resources (people or otherwise) for JVs to turn to for mentoring, networking, or other support.

*(Sample language) We are going to do a modified “Mind map,” a big drawing of ideas that lets us record thoughts in categories. Feel free to draw all over your paper, use colors, or just make straight lists if that works better for you. Start with yourself in the middle, draw a circle. Is there a central question you have right now? Write it there, too.*

*Who has helped you get to where you are today? (Somewhere on the paper, list a few names, or make a bubble for each name) What attributes do they have? (Under each name, list a few attributes). Notice any consistency? Star or underline anyone you would like to talk with again.*

*Vocational exploration: Is there a professional area that you would like to learn more about, like nursing, ministry, or nonprofit fundraising? Or is there a personal life journey that you would like more perspective on, like marriage, parenthood, women’s solo travel, or building a tiny house? Choose one area for right now. Write that in your center bubble... or turn the paper over and make another map on the other side.*

*In one corner of your paper, Write “Whom do I know?” Like spokes of a wheel, make a list or cluster of anyone you know personally who does what you want to learn about... friends? Family? Old teachers? Now cast your mind farther: Whom do you know who knows someone with experience in your area of interest? Add them to your list or cluster. You might be surprised about some*

*connections in your network. In another part of the paper, make a new list or cluster: What organizations do you know of that might have potential mentors? If you are looking at a particular city, this could be a law firm that specializes in what you want to do. Or more generally, your college's alumni office, or FJV groups.*

*Look at all you have written down. Choose three to five people or organizations you can call... Whenever possible, allow a mutual contact to introduce you. People generally like to give advice and help someone else in the field, especially if they have a connection to someone you know, to your placement site, to your college, or to JVC Northwest, etc. People love to tell their stories, particularly when they are passionate about something. Jot a note or two about how you might get contact information, if you do not have it. Jot a note or two about what you might say. What is your goal? Write that down. Example: "My goal is to learn what I need to do to hike the Pacific Crest Trail." "My goal is to become a civil rights lawyer at the top firm in LA." "My goal is to build spiritual community with other people who want to live the four values in Peoria." These introductory conversations are often called "informational interviews," and one key to success is never to ask for a job during the informational interview.*

### **Large Group Debrief (5-10 min)**

Elicit large-group reflections on this process, or questions or insights on seeking mentors and resources.

#### Activity D: Weighted pros and cons list (15-20 min)

Another set of resources we have, that it is important to remember to access, are our inner resources - our values and passions. This activity is a modified Ignatian tool for making decisions that draws on heart-knowledge and values as well as reason. Reflecting on feelings and values can demystify some of the complexity of vocational discernment; it may lead to clarity of motivation or at least perhaps help tease out and release some of the agonizing tangle we can feel in decision-making. This may be used as a guided meditation/journaling (give a minute or three between each invitation for writing and reflection), or as a tool for solo journaling (see Handouts F and G).

*(Sample language) Identify a decision or choice that you are in the middle of making. Or, a decision you have recently made. Form a proposal, stated as a positive concrete choice: "I will stay in Alaska," or "I will go to nursing school." Write down both the proposal and its alternative (I will go to nursing school; I defer for a year and will look for work). Make a list of pros and cons for each choice. Take a moment to sit in silence, to open your heart to the decision and to the lists. If you wish, pray for God's leading and clarity. Do you sense any movement? Beside the list of pros and cons, take a minute to record any feelings that come up with each choice. What values are reflected in each choice? (There might be some overlap) Write these down as well. Take a breath, get in touch with your heart again. Look over your lists. Do any questions arise? What do you notice?*

Ask the large group, or have people reflect in pairs: What came up for you, or what do you notice about your decisions, values, motivations?



### Activity E: Focus Groups discussion (20-30 min)

Have JVs self-select into small groups based on what they are doing next year OR other interest groups. Possible groups: those doing additional year of service; graduate school; employment; unknown; those interested in staying in the present for now (i.e., what are you learning about vocation from your placement and life right now?)... other relevant groups? The large group will know. This might be a place to incorporate FJV visitors or staff, if they are appropriate resource people for specific groups.

*(Sample language) Now we will take some time to talk in small focus groups, to share resources or struggles with one another. Choose a group that fits you; feel free to attend more than one group. Or, if absolutely none apply, take quiet time. Questions to get started (consider writing these on whiteboard or flipchart for easy reference):*

- What questions do you have about what you are doing?
  - What are you most excited about?
  - What resources might you have to share with each other?
  - How might you continue to explore the JVC values and your own personal values/vocation in the coming year?
  - Feel free to also use this space to process some of the things you have been thinking or encountering about vocation this weekend

**Activity F: Small group check in and identify one next step (20-30 min)**

Have JVs get back into the small groups they have been sharing in all weekend.

**Questions:**

- Where are you in your vocational journey right now? What has come up for you this weekend? (2-3 minutes each person)
- What is one next step you can take, from wherever you are? It could be a new question to ask, a person to talk to, more meditation time or other way to nurture your spirit...
- Take a few moments to express gratitude for the small group sharing.

Possible resource: “Enacting Stories” Handout H

**Sharing of intentions and closing (10 min)**

Each person is invited to share one next step, or one thing they are taking away from this retreat. Close with blessing, reading, or prayer.

## Session 5 | FJV panel and conversation

Ideally 2-4 visiting FJVs or friends of JVC Northwest. The Program Coordinator or facilitator will moderate, and may also participate if appropriate. Possible Focus questions for FJVs/ friends of JVC Northwest:

1. Briefly introduce yourself, 2-3 min on what you are up to now and how that relates to your sense of vocation.
2. What people or events have been influences or guides to you on your journey into career/life/vocation? (one or two examples)
3. What has most surprised you in your vocational journey?
4. Do you have a story of a mistake you made, or a choice that seemed like a miss-step that led to growth or living your gifts in a new way?
5. What advice or what questions do you have for JVs just finishing their year of service?

## **Handout A | Touchstones for Creating Hospitable Spaces**

*Adapted from The Center for Courage and Renewal by Volunteers Exploring Vocation*

### **1. Be 100 percent present - extending and presuming welcome.**

Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this place and presume you are welcome as well.

### **2. Listen deeply.**

Listen intently to what is said, listen to feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, “to listen to another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery, may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”

### **3. It is never “share or die.”**

You will be invited to share in pairs. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.

### **4. No fixing.**

We are not here to set someone else straight or to help right another’s wrong. We are here to witness to God’s movement in the sacred stories we share.

### **5. Suspend judgment.**

Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.

### **6. Identify assumptions.**

By identifying our assumptions, which are usually transparent, we can set them aside and open the sharing and learning to greater possibilities.

### **7. Speak your truth.**

You are invited to say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. A helpful practice is to use “I” statements.

### **8. Practice confidentiality care.**

We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of stories shared. If anyone asks that a story shared be kept in confidence, the group will honor the request.

### **9. Turn to wonder.**

If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, or shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder, “I wonder what brought her to this place?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

## Handout B | Mindfulness Walk

As you walk or sit outdoors, try to hold your thoughts lightly. You might clear your mind, or turn your attention outward with all of your senses. Feel free to move slowly, or stop. The main task is to open yourself, and to notice, to savor. As you walk or sit, you might ask one or more of these questions:

- What wants my attention?
- Where might Spirit be moving?
- What is being evoked in me, physically or emotionally?
- If something does catch your attention, spend time simply being. Accept what is offered. Interact, listen.

After your time of deep listening and contemplation, you might reflect in your journal about what you experienced; closely describe what you encounter; or use an image as a prompt for free-writing.

## Handout C | Listening to Your Life

Using art supplies (paper, markers, string, paint, magazines, etc), create a drawing or collage to represent your journey with vocation. It might be a life map, with significant personal and/or spiritual events, or a collection of words and images that represent where you are right now with vocation. Listen to your life. Is there an image or metaphor that begins to emerge for you, to describe your journey? What are key moments of your life that have brought you to where you are now? This is not a fine-art activity (unless you want it to be!). Rather, this is a chance to step into an intuitive place of interacting with our lives. As you answer questions or look at images for collage, or choose colors for drawing a timeline, don't think too hard - go with what grabs you. As you reflect on your story, or the way you often tell your story, consider:

- Is there a metaphor or guiding image for your journey that stands out to you?
- In what moments in your life have you felt close to the center of who you are, or “on track”? When have you felt “off track?”
- Also see handout “Movie of your life” for additional ways to approach this activity and questions for engaging your story

## Handout D | The Movie of Your Life Questions

*From Revealing Vocation: Finding God's Story in Our Lives, from Volunteers Exploring Vocation*

As you reflect on your life it might be easier to think about your own narrative (and God's place in it) like you would a movie. In Donald Miller's book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, someone proposes making a movie out of Miller's life. As he helps edit and write a screenplay, he realizes he isn't living a "good story." He isn't a character he finds compelling. He doesn't have a clear goal. As Miller tries to re-write the story of his life, he eventually begins to live a better one.

On the table, there are materials for you to create a collage, write a narrative in prose form and/or a poem, create a concept map, or anything else you may find helpful. You may even want to jot down answers to the questions on the handout. Do whatever will best help you reflect on your story. The point is that you work with your storyline in a hands-on, creative way. Think about what you would tell someone else if you were asked to share your story with them. Would it make sense? Is it moving? Would they "get it"? If not, what needs to be rewritten?

**How do you feel about the story of your life? To get you thinking out of the box, here are some fun questions. See how they may apply to your life.**

- Who is the main character in your story? If it isn't really you then who is it? Are you okay with being a central or marginal character in the story?
- What's the main conflict in your story? Who or what are the villains in your story, if there are any? Do you have an arch nemesis?
- What are you after? Interesting characters are the ones who want something. What's your buried treasure? Your personal quest? What do you have to get or achieve before the credits can roll? Do you know what you want?
- What is the source of your powers? Were you born with them? Or do your strengths come from a special occurrence? Freak accident? Obtained through a magical object?
- What's your kryptonite - your weakness? Do you have a tragic flaw - a personality trait that could lead to your ultimate downfall without an attitude adjustment? Are there memories and emotional burdens from the past that keep you from moving on?
- What meetings or interactions have changed you the most? What other characters have influenced you? Were they chance meetings? Faithful sidekicks (good friends who help you through good times and bad)? Wise mentors?
- What have the pivotal moments been? Have you had a showdown? Diffused a bomb at the last second?
- Where have you adventures taken you? When were you trapped in sewers? Have you been shipwrecked, but found your way off the island? Have you met strange aliens, only to find they were more like you than you thought?  
Where are you happiest? Where would your secret lair be?

## Handout E | Discussion Questions

*You don't have to answer all these questions; they are resources.*

- In the midst of all these stories are real people living with purpose, connected to core values. Who do you know - name one person - who in your eyes is living in vocation. What is it about that person that leads to your belief?
- Now tell about someone you know who does not seem to be living in vocation; what is it about that person that leads you to this conclusion?
- Reflect on the people you have named as living in vocation. How might they be part of God's larger story?
- Thinking back on your Listening to Your Life creations, how does your story connect with God's story as we might know it? Do you see connections in the lives of others in your small group?



## Handout F | Weighted Pros and Cons: A modified Ignatian discernment tool

When feeling stuck beneath a weighty decision, it is important to remember to access our inner resources - our values and passions. This activity is a modified Ignatian tool for making decisions that draws on heart-knowledge and values as well as reason. Reflecting on feelings and values can demystify some of the complexity of vocational discernment; it may lead to clarity of motivation or at least perhaps help tease out and release some of the agonizing tangle we can feel in decision-making. And, in taking time to breathe and pray, we remember that we are not alone in our process; we can ask for God's guidance.

You will need your journal and writing utensils of choice.

- Identify a decision or choice that you are in the middle of making. Or, a decision you have recently made. Form a proposal, stated as a positive concrete choice: "I will stay in Alaska," or "I will go to nursing school."
- Write down both the proposal and its alternative (I will go to nursing school; I will defer for a year and look for work).
- Make a list of pros and cons for each choice.
- Take a moment to sit in silence, to open your heart to the decision and to the lists. If you wish, pray for God's leading and clarity.
- Do you sense any movement?
- Beside the list of pros and cons, take a minute to record any feelings that come up with each choice.
- What values are reflected in each choice? (There might be some overlap) Write these down as well.
- Take a breath, get in touch with your heart again.
- Look over your lists. Do any questions arise? What do you notice?

What came up for you, or what do you notice about your decisions, values, and motivations?

## Handout G | Journaling Questions

from *Healing the Purpose of Your Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn

- When in your life have you been so absorbed in something that time flew by? For example, as a child what were you doing when you were called for dinner and came in late?
- What are you most grateful for today? When are you least grateful for? If you were to ask yourself these questions every day, what pattern would you see?
- When have you felt most alive, especially in your body? What were the times of most life that you would like to repeat?
- What would you do if you had time and money to do anything?
- What is the wildest thing you have done in your life that turned out better than you ever imagined? If you were assured of not failing, what is the wildest thing you can imagine doing now?
- Who is the person you most wanted to grow up to be like? Whom do you most want to be like today? Conversely, is there anyone you would like to mentor?
- What movies or stories have moved you most?
- What do your best friends say they like about you? What do they see as your unique way of giving love?
- What is your special way of receiving love?
- What is it that you have to do-- that you can't not do?
- If you had only one year to live, what would you do?

## Handout H | Enacting Our Stories - Questions for reflection and discussion

*From Revealing Vocation: Finding God's Story in Our Lives, from Volunteers Exploring Vocation*

Is there anything from the previous sessions that you find particularly compelling, problematic, or interesting? What has stuck with you?

Think about the ways you've already gone against the grain in enacting your own life story. Just by deciding to spend a year as a volunteer, you've leaped into the unknown! It's involved quite a lot of risk-taking. Do you consider taking this year to be a countercultural decision?

Why did you enter this year of service? What hopes and/or reservations did you hold about the year?

What have you discovered that you want to keep alive within yourself after this year is over? What do you want to nurture or cultivate? What have you done to keep these discoveries alive up until this point?

What are your current inspirations? Fears? Concerns?

*MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I actually am doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

- Thomas Merton, "Thoughts in Solitude"