

## The Power of invitation

**Anne Fleischl**



It's funny how a simple invitation can have a life changing effect! I can remember about 12 years ago, I was sitting in the diner with John Campoli and Eleanor & Bob Suroweic. Eleanor invited me to a Voluntas team meeting at her home. I decided to attend because of my great affection for these fine people. I never dreamed that Voluntas would have affected me so deeply over time.

For the past 29 years, I have worked in telecommunications; of which 26 years I have been for the same employer. Working in a service department is never easy, clients call predominantly when frustrated with various issues. My job can be quite stressful and challenges me on technological, intellectual, creative and spiritual levels. The telecommunications field keeps evolving and changing as VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) communication becomes the norm. As voice and data networks converge, troubleshooting problems become exponentially more complex. I program & service phone systems, provide technical support to the techs in the field and work as the liaison between my clients and their dial tone and internet service providers, especially when they have questions or service type issues on their account.

If you've ever had to call into a utility company, I'm sure you will appreciate how challenging living the Voluntas way of life can be (*being present, being of service, living in the present moment, and the absence of destructive criticism & complaint*). These were the

things that piqued my curiosity about Voluntas. Was it **REALLY** possible to live this way on a daily basis when I'd have frequent dealings with various dial tone and service providers? Often my greatest challenge I have during my work day is simply being present to the other person while working on their particular issue. I do not claim to have "mastered" living Voluntas in these situations, but I would like to believe that there has been slow, albeit steady, progress. I am learning to see this work as a sort of vocation – in that I am called to be the presence of Christ in the midst of the present moment regardless of what I am doing.

Ministry wise, I've worked predominantly in both youth and liturgical ministries. I was extremely fortunate to have a high school teacher, Mike Lyons, who had a profound influence in my life. He was present to me, cared about me when I needed someone to really care about me, taught me the basics of guitar & encouraged me to participate in a weekend retreat called "Antioch". This retreat forever changed my life. I went from knowing "about" God to knowing the "person" of God and developing an intimate relationship with Him. When I started college, I began working in parishes as a "part time" youth minister. I was grateful that I was able to do for others what he had done for me. I did part time parish youth ministry work for 18 years and I continue working with parish confirmation retreat programs today. It is my hope that God has been able to touch others through me even in the slightest of ways, as Mike has blessed my life. Through the wonder of social media, I've been able to reconnect with him many years later!

Life can be very stressful at times. Going to the gym has been an unexpected blessing. I never expected to actually enjoy it. I have lost some weight in the process and I feel immensely better. I use my time swimming as an opportunity for contemplative prayer. The enveloping water and its silence; and the freedom from technology (cell phones, tablets, email, social media, etc) and the simple luxury of being uninterrupted provide the perfect background for me. When I get out in the fresh air (ride a bike, walk, etc.) I get an opportunity to reflect on God's goodness and beauty. This exercise has led me to a more integrated cohesive experience of body, mind and spirit.

I seem to have found a niche by participating in endurance sports. It mirrors my life as I struggle with issues and rely on the Lord to get me through. I may not be fast, but, I have stamina. Every event is a unique challenge. By the grace of God, and the work that he has begun, last year I completed two sprint

triathlons and two lengthy bike rides (25 and 36 miles) for charity. This coming season, I'm planning on participating in several triathlons.



In trying to tie this all together, I like the advice found in Hebrews, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, **let us strip off every weight that slows us down**, especially the sin that so easily trips us up and **let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.**” (Hebrews 12:1)

