

Spirituality, Faith and Religion in LVC

This is an excerpt from the Spirituality Night guide that Volunteers use in their communities to explore spirituality

Spirituality: an individual person's experience of and expression of a connection to "the divine."

Example: Someone who connects her spirituality with the earth might experience that connection spending time in nature.

Faith: Who or what we place our trust in.

Example: Someone agnostic might put his faith in values like: respect for others and the environment, universal human rights, equality of all people, freedom of conscience, and commitment to family and community.

Religion: A community of commitment.

Example: A Jewish person might observe Sabbath at home with her family on Friday evenings, and attend a synagogue on Saturday mornings.

Obviously, these might not be exactly the definitions that you're familiar with. We hope they'll be helpful, though, in conversations with your housemates and others in LVC. How would you define these three terms?

The Core Practices as Spiritual Practices

If spirituality is our encounter with and/or expression of the divine, the spiritual practices are habits and paths we use to encounter or express our experience of that reality.

Community

Intentional community is a spiritual practice when we **encounter the divine in one another**. This encounter may come in terms of mutual care, healing, or through challenges to grow as persons. Living in community gives us the opportunity to express our experiences of the divine in words and service to each other.

Social Justice

Work for social justice **expresses the fundamental worth of all human beings and of the earth and all life on it**. By seeking to interrupt cycles of domination and exploitation, social justice looks beyond current human systems to a higher, divine vision for human life and purpose.

Simplicity and Sustainability

Simplicity in its many forms – time, space, energy, and finances, for example – **makes space in our lives for encounters with the divine**, and the focus on those things most important to our faith. Sustainability connects us to the earth and all our fellow-creatures, human, plant and animal. Together, simplicity and sustainability give us a path to express our spirituality by caring for ourselves, one another, and the whole world.

Walking the Tightrope

Lutheran Volunteer Corps was founded by Luther Place Memorial Church, is officially affiliated with the ELCA, and has many placements, supporters, staff, alumni and Volunteers who are also part of the Lutheran church. At the same time, from its very beginnings LVC has also included Volunteers, staff, supporters and placements from other communities of commitment, along with folks who are not connected to a religion.

This means that LVC is in some ways like a tightrope walker holding a pole for balance. On one end of the pole are LVC's connections to the Lutheran church with its rich history, traditions, theology, and institutions. On the other end of the pole is LVC's commitment to including people of other religions, and people with a variety of spiritual expressions. If one end of the pole gets too much emphasis, we fall off. On the other hand, without the pole to balance us, we can't move forward.

You'll need to walk a tightrope when you talk about spirituality and faith in your house community. On the one end of the pole, your sense of clarity about and commitment to your spirituality and faith will give energy and interest to discussions. On the other end of the pole, you'll need to be open to truly hearing and accepting your housemate's beliefs and experiences to make respectful, community-building dialogue possible.

The Core Practices as Bridges

LVC as an organization and as a community of people – Volunteers, alumni, staff, and supporters – shares a common set of values in the form of our three core practices: Simplicity and Sustainability, Intentional Community, and Social Justice.

The core practices can be a jumping-off place for you to talk with your housemates about spirituality and faith, and for you to grow in your own spirituality. Each person comes to faith and spirituality with a different perspective, but each of you has also committed to exploring the three core practices. In this sense, **the core practices are like a bridge between you and your housemates**. Each of you may be coming from a different shore, but you can meet in the middle by standing on the bridge and practicing the core practices together.

Example: A Jewish synagogue and a Christian church might work together to help build affordable housing. On the job site, people from the church and the synagogue have the opportunity to explain how their faith helps motivate them to do the work they're doing, and to understand better the differences between them.

Addressing the Problem of the Empty Table

Many Volunteers come to LVC hoping to grow spiritually. It is definitely possible to do this, but it is also possible to procrastinate and avoid addressing spiritual questions. By being a part

of LVC, you commit to make spirituality and faith a part of your house conversations each month. But LVC leaves the decision to develop your personal spirituality to you.

What some Volunteers have found, however, is that **when the time comes to sit down and talk with each other about their faith, many don't really know what they believe** – they were hoping someone else in the house could give them some good ideas! This is a little like coming to a potluck without a dish, hoping that other people will bring the marshmallow salad, the baked beans and the green bean casserole, and finding out that everyone else had the same idea.

It's the problem of the empty table.

During your year in LVC, you have the opportunity to explore new spiritual practices and to take steps to address this problem of the empty table. In the past, Volunteers have used their year to:

- Read books about spirituality, faith and religion
- Develop a meditation practice
- Observe a day of rest/Sabbath
- Journal
- Learn about prayer beads
- Commit to a new church
- Practice daily scripture or devotional readings
- Visit new religious communities

Each of these practices – and many others – can help you have something to bring to the table.