

# THE COMPANION

*The newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry*

Autumn 2015

Issue 18



**Welcome 2015-2016 Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Volunteers!**

## **Living More Connected and More Free**

**By August Kunkel, 2014-2015 Volunteer**  
**A graduate of the University of Notre Dame**

Throughout the year, we did weekly challenges in hopes of realizing ways that we could live more simply. I remember the awkwardness and hilarity of wearing each other's clothes, and the arguments and discussions over how seriously we were taking these challenges, especially when tasked with taking showers in the dark. Some challenges tested us more than others; I certainly had a hard time eating rice and beans for an entire week. The challenges represented concentrated efforts at living simply; they changed the way we went about our day as we explored what we really needed to be happy.

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*Note from the Director,  
Shannon Curran*

This fall has been a time of new beginnings for Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. In addition to our five new volunteers, two staff members joined our BSVM community this season. These new positions were the result of over a year and a half of work on re-visioning and re-organizing our staff structure to more fully support our current ministry and to work at developing a second community of volunteers. I am pleased to welcome Olivia Steback as our Program Manager and Andres Gomez as our Site Leader. We introduce Olivia below and you will meet Andres in our next edition of *The Companion*. As you will see, both Olivia and Andres bring a wealth of related experience and a passion for the charism of the Congregation of Bon Secours and the mission of BSVM to our ministry.

*Note from the Editor,  
Olivia Steback,  
BSVM Program Manager*

Hello! My name is Olivia Steback and I am very excited to be joining Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry as Program Manager. I have a passion for service grounded in prayer and feel incredibly blessed to have the opportunity to live out this

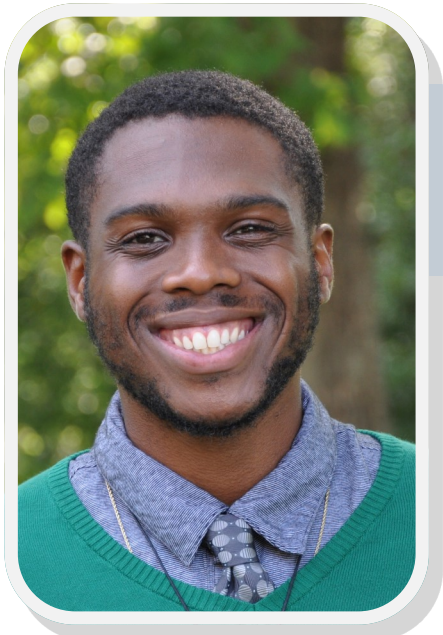


passion through my daily work. My experience as a teacher, serving in a Catholic Worker community, working in an office supporting graduate level medical education and living in a religious community for a period of time, has been a wonderful preparation for my position with BSVM. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to accompany the staff, volunteers, alumni and the greater community of southwest Baltimore as we journey and grow together. Thank you to so many members of the Bon Secours' family who have welcomed me with open arms!

Within this issue of *The Companion*, alumni members of our community, Co'Dale Cook, Matthew Parra and August Kunkel, explore ways in which they were challenged by the pillars of our ministry to examine their own hearts and lives. Through this life changing process, they became more aware of the sacredness of their own being. It is this awareness, a mindfulness of being loved and able to love, that reverberates out into the world, creating change that may or may not be visible.

In the novel *Middlemarch* the author, George Eliot, concludes by referring to the main character with these lines, "...the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive, for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on un-historic acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully hidden lives..." The diffusive effect Eliot speaks of is a stream of good that connects creation through the ages. We are grateful to have the opportunity to gain a glimpse into Co'Dale's, Matthew's and August's growing awareness of this stream of good; God's continual presence within themselves and within the world.

Eliot also speaks to the pillar of simple living. Living simply, letting go of both exterior and interior constraints, is also a letting go of the need for accolade and acknowledgment. Those living simple lives, live hidden lives while their love quietly diffuses into the world, changing it from of the inside out. Our past and current volunteers live out this truth, transforming the world through simple compassionate presence and acts of love.



## Butterfly Effect

By Co'Dale Cook, 2014-2015 Volunteer  
A graduate of St. Mary's College of California

A young caterpillar found himself separated from his family. He grew weary as he searched for hours, but hope slipped away by the second. As soon as the sun dwindled into the horizon, the caterpillar looked up to find two spirited wings stretching across his darkened sky. In a simple exchange, the caterpillar asked the winged creature what he could offer it in exchange for being flown over the land to locate his family. The creature said, "You too can grow wings. It's free, but not cheap." Mystified, the caterpillar examined this statement. The creature then informed the caterpillar the wings would cost no more than the relinquishment of the life he has come to know.

Growing spiritually is a gift given by God, but in order to acquire that gift we must be willing to reimburse Christ with our lives. It is through this transaction that we come to understand the true desires God has for us and shares with us. This process of spiritual growth lies in cultivating our knowledge of the gospel and connecting it with experience, which allows us to see our true existence as humans. We then come to realize we are worthy of salvation, or deliverance from anything meant to harm us and pull us further away from Love.

Consider how the wind contributes to the transformation of the surrounding world. We witness both the peace and power the wind exudes on its surroundings, yet we remain blind to its physical structure. Similarly, the Holy Spirit uses us as vessels, supplies us with spiritual ammunition to love deeply and secures us with a magnitude of peace, rooted in knowledge that exceeds our own understanding. To acknowledge God's grace, and our calling, means having faith that the Holy Spirit is living within us.

While visiting a patient, I asked if there was anything I could do. The patient brushed me off, and after a blank pause, I responded by saying, "Okay, your nurse should be in shortly." I turned away slowly and headed for the door, my head hanging to the ground in disappointment. I felt like I blew another chance to be a source of encouragement. The patient caught me before I could clear the room and posed a simple question, "Do you actually believe the nurse will be here soon?" This interaction opened a door for the Holy Spirit, the patient's question made me reevaluate and change the way I enter each patient's room. How did I expect anyone to believe in something, I myself did not believe to be noble enough to share? In other words, I did not believe his nurse was coming any time soon, but I did believe in the LOVE that brought me to Bon Secours. This is what really mattered.

*"If you want others to be happy,  
practice compassion.  
If you want to be happy,  
practice compassion."*

Dalai Lama XIV

One of the keys to accessing the Holy Spirit within yourself and others, is to celebrate others with compassion and prayer. This means being kind to yourself and turning inward to celebrate the mystery of faith. I like to believe the caterpillar allowed his faith to return him to love. There's no catch, simply surrender the life with which you have become comfortable.

# A Destination at Wonder

By Matthew Parra, 2013-2014 Volunteer  
A graduate of Boston College

On our retreat I walked a labyrinth. It is an exercise in which a person walks in circles in an attempt to feel God and maybe even know Jesus. Perhaps that's not the official purpose, but that was my objective. The first time I walked the labyrinth I was skeptical, but I



found myself filled by the wandering. My second go-round brought something different. It started off futile and therefore frustrating. I couldn't find God anywhere in that maze. As a community, we had recently completed a reading about knowing God in all things

and how people find him so profoundly in nature. Historically, I am not real deft with this. I tried to find God in the dirt between the stones, but mainly just saw erosion. I wanted to sense His touch in the winter wind that kissed my cheek, but it was mostly just cold. I got a little angry. Anger meandered its way through my cerebral and spiritual circuitry making a stop at confusion before reaching a destination at wonder.

I considered how what I was doing was wild. I focused on what was under my feet and thought about how someone had to construct this sacred small intestine of stone. In my imagination, 15 years ago a man could not hold his 7 month-old girl at night when he got home from work, and I felt partly responsible. He could not change the channel on his brand new TV, the gift he gave himself for his hard hours. He couldn't lift his baby or grasp the remote because he was icing his scratched up palms and swollen fingertips. He winced when he squeezed the handle of the freezer. There he was with a bag of frozen peas, gently caressing the cold plastic in his battered hands and wishing it was instead the warm skin of his daughter. He had spent all day mindlessly digging holes in unforgiving gravel and meticulously laying out stones, all so some confused kid, years later, could walk in circles trying to find Jesus. I stared at my hands and compared them to what that man's must have looked like. I couldn't help but wonder if Peter, Paul and their friends ever walked in circles trying to find Jesus after he had died. I wondered if Jesus, while on earth, ever walked in circles trying to find God. I doubted it very much. It left me annoyed and asking why it was hard for me; why I had to go through all this.

Then I came to understand, I go through all this, walking in circles and looking for God, because I need God. Although I would like it to be easier, my spirituality is sometimes a struggle. I have questions, fears and doubts, but I am pretty sure on one thing: I want God because I need Him. As simple as this idea seems, and despite the clarity that retrospect gives it, I don't think I embraced this until recently. God has become more than just a great architect or explainer, which is all I wanted Him to be for a long time. God is

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## Welcome 2015-2016 Volunteers!



**Mackenzie Buss**  
Bon Secours  
Baltimore Hospital  
Renal Department  
University of Notre Dame  
Hometown: Minneapolis, MN



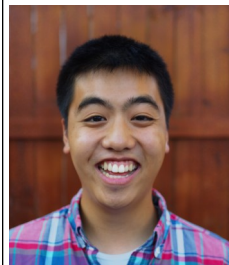
**Elizabeth Modde**  
Bon Secours  
Baltimore Hospital  
Patient Advocacy  
Loyola University Chicago  
Hometown: Kirkwood, MO



**Nicole Odum**  
Bon Secours  
Tele-Heart Program  
Loyola Marymount University  
Hometown: Mission Viejo, CA



**Gerard Ondrey**  
Bon Secours  
Baltimore Hospital  
St. Martin's Hall, Inpatient Unit  
Villanova University  
Hometown: Minneapolis, MN



**Alex Yeo**  
Bon Secours  
Baltimore Hospital  
Emergency Department  
College of the Holy Cross  
Hometown: Andover, MA





more than just an egomaniacal Frank Lloyd Wright or an infallible Wikipedia; I depend on God. When I deny God's presence in my life it is obvious; I can feel the void. I am selfish, judgmental and even just a little mean. These are all undeniable parts of who I am, but not God. God is none of these things. I have come to find that God is really quite good. You can't even spell the word good without God, or without the second "o." I dare you to try. God is good and, with his love, maybe I can be good too.

I see Jesus in the fragile faces I work, walk, laugh and live with, but I also see Him in myself. For a long time I've existed under the credence that one finds God in others. This still feels right to me, and it can happen every day if I am open to it. I neglected the fact, however, that I am an "other" too. I can find God in myself, and it is my love for and from others that enables this discovery. When I can uncover this perpetual piece of revelation, it becomes possible to weave God's love for me into my life. It changes the way I approach the simplest things: friends, leftovers, enemies, old sponges, strangers, empty peanut butter jars.

We talk about the pillar of "growing spiritually," but I'm not sold on this being appropriate language for the churning in my spiritual life. Growth seems to imply something directional, like there is something I can't quite reach. It implies that I can pour holy water on my lonely little spiritual seed. If I give it the proper light, one day I will have sprouted enough to grab hold of that divine thing I've always longingly looked up at. I know Jesus often capitalized on arboreal metaphors like this, but I'm not sure if this one holds true for my experience. My spiritual journey has not followed an unwavering trajectory. It has not been moving forward or growing upward. I don't think I would want it to either. Growth seems limiting in this way. I'd prefer walking in circles with God by my side to walking towards Him alone. Sometimes I feel like this is an inefficient way of connecting with the gift of God's love for me, but thus is the nature of the labyrinth, as well as my spirituality. I am coming to see that the spiritual journey is sometimes sloppy, but sloppy seems like it might be closer to the Truth.

The more I think about it the more I come to understand that living simply points to something deeper and more universal. It is more about intentionally trying to live a better life. I think living simply is the most accessible and recognizable way to live intentionally because it counters one of the biggest ways that society reaches into our daily lives; the unspoken idea that consumption produces happiness. Living simply gives us a chance to live more as humans and less as consumers.

During our weekly challenges, we quickly realized that simple living was far from easy. Many of my daily habits—what and where I ate, how I spent time and money, my use of technology—were largely formed by habit. When the community began living simply by cooking at home, reducing the use of technology and consciously trying to use less energy, I thought to myself, "Wait, what reasons did I have for doing things a certain way before?" It was largely out of convenience. My parents always stressed that money and possessions should never be a focus in life, but I have learned this year that living simply goes beyond the material. It is intentionally deciding how to better spend time. For example, shopping at stores that sustainably source their food and supporting local businesses.



When we live simply and intentionally, we enable ourselves to relate to people on a deeper level, especially to those who live with less than most of society. It allows us to better appreciate considerations and decisions that many people must make every day. Living simply is living in solidarity with those around us, and it is the absence of this solidarity that fractures and weakens our society. When we are able to live more like our neighbors, spending money primarily on food and not on clothes or entertainment, we start to see that there is less that separates us than we had previously thought.

*"I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures." Lao Tzu*

Intentional simple living both keeps us grounded in a way that we can relate to others and frees us from those things in life that are not life-giving. For me, it is easy to see how living simply and intentionally has changed me. The mundane in life becomes beautiful and life-giving. Breaks from television and cell phones are welcomed and preparing and sharing a meal has become something I look forward to each day.

# The Community That Prays Together Stays Together

## 2015 BSVM Alumni and Volunteer Retreats



The first BSVM Alumni Retreat was held at the BSVM Volunteer House in late October. From left to right: Meghan Krueger (2014), Crystal Truong (2008), Alicia Manteiga (2008), Shannon Curran (Director), Danielle Hickman (2012), Joy Aker (facilitator), Patrick O'Neil (2013), Sarah Ceponis (2011), August Kunkel (2014)

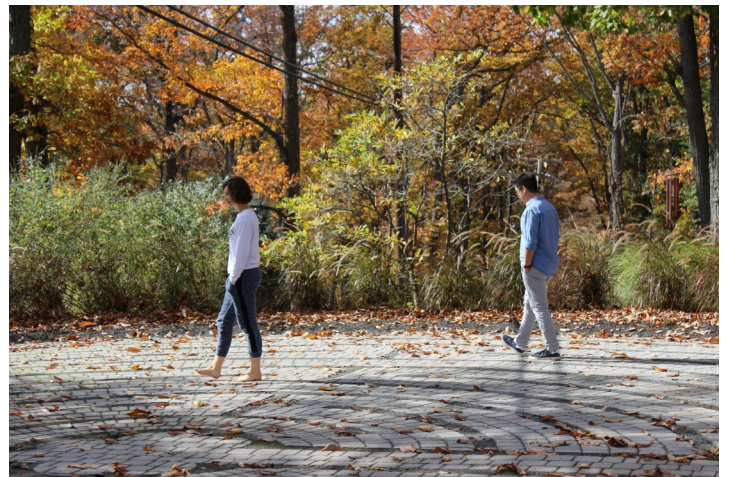
Soon after the alumni volunteers left town, the 2015-2016 BSVM Volunteers participated in their fall retreat.



Mackenzie, Elizabeth, Alex, Gerard, and Nicole spent a day building trust and communication at Genesee Valley.



Patrick, August and Sarah share stories.



2008

Alicia Manteiga, Shannon Curran and Crystal Truong



Prayer and Reflection in Marriottsville

## Meet Elizabeth



### Team-Building Day!

From left to right: Shannon Curran, Mackenzie Buss, Elizabeth Modde, Alex Yeo, Gerard Ondrey, Nicole Odlum, Olivia Steback.

### What is your favorite book?

I really enjoy poetry because it covers a range of emotions and moods. You can read a poem in the five minutes before the bus comes or spend an evening thinking about the questions and ideas a poem can raise. There is such an art to how poetry is crafted. Recently, I've enjoyed Mary Oliver and Kay Ryan. I love Margaret Atwood's *They are hostile nations*.

### Do you have a hidden talent?

I'm a great bargain shopper and junk salvager. I am very creative about how to use things.

### What is your favorite food?

I love dark chocolate and coffee! Also, I like a good beet salad.

### If you sat down next to Jesus on a bus, what would you talk about?

I would talk to Jesus about how to find the inspiration of love in the midst of brokenness. Frustrations accompany radical solidarity with the poor. While I see potential and beauty in the midst of suffering, I also struggle with the greed and apathy that seems ever present along the journey for social change.

## And Gerard

### What is your favorite book?

Friday Night Lights, it's a very well-written book that serves as a social commentary on the often larger-than-life role sports (specifically football) plays in our society. I love how accessible it is to sports and non-sports fans alike.

### Do you have a hidden talent?

I really enjoy writing poetry and short stories.

### What is your favorite food?

New England clam chowder

### If you could live in any period of history, when would it be and why?

It would be during the civil rights movement. It would be fascinating to see how America's views on race slowly began to shift and how prominent leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stayed true to their message despite the massive opposition they sometimes faced.



Gerard Ondrey with Nicole Odlum



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**Cover Photo From Left to Right**

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Mackenzie Buss

Alex Yeo

Rev. Patrick Besel

Elizabeth Modde

Gerard Ondrey

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**Ted Walker**

Catholic Worker

**Our Mission**

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, sponsored by the Sisters of Bon Secours, provides the opportunity for women and men to participate in the Sisters' commitment to justice in radical solidarity with the poor, the suffering, and those most in need. By sharing the Bon Secours charism of compassion, healing, and liberation, the ministry nurtures and sustains full-time volunteers in their personal and communal journeys towards transformation through service with others.

**Support Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry**

**Share your time and enthusiasm.** Your personal presence is one of the best ways to support the program. Please consider sending a letter of support and interest, an invitation for site-seeing in Baltimore, or an invitation to dinner with your family.

**Support the program financially.** It costs about \$16,000 to support one volunteer for the year, including rent, health insurance, stipend and funds for community support. In addition, we are trying to make some improvements to the volunteer residence. Monetary donations or gently used furnishings for the volunteer house are greatly appreciated.

**Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent directly to:**

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry  
 1525 Marriottsville Road, Marriottsville, MD 21104

**BSVM Staff:** Shannon Curran, Director; Olivia Steback, Program Manager; Andres Gomez, Site Leader; Danielle Hickman, Volunteer Recruiter; Marie Truffer, Administrative Assistant