

THE COMPANION

The newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Spring 2016

Issue 19



“ ... I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

Deuteronomy 15:11

A Balancing Act

By Gerard Ondrey, 2015-2016 Volunteer
A graduate of Villanova University

If there is a definition of one word that has changed the most for me over the last few years, it’s probably the definition of the word ‘service’. This evolution has definitely continued during my time serving at Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital. I think often about the right way to serve, or if certain things qualify as service and other things don’t qualify as service. I may not have any more concrete answers to these questions than I did before coming to Baltimore, but I have begun to realize that this ambiguity may be an answer in itself. Perhaps the reason it’s so hard to determine a formula for the correct way to serve is because it’s not black and white, but a mixture of many different aspects. Indeed, everything I’ve learned about service this year seems to come back to another word, one that coincidentally means an equal distribution of many different objects or ideas: balance.

Continued on page 4

*Editor's Corner,
Olivia Steback,
BSVM Program Manager*



In this issue of *The Companion*, Gerard Ondrey and Elizabeth Modde reflect on the pillars of learning through service and living simply. They share from a place of vulnerability as they look deeply into their own experiences and reflect on their discoveries. Having the courage to first explore these pillars through the lens of their own inner worlds and then to express themselves so honestly and openly is a gift to us all.

In Brene Brown's book, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*, Brown states, "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage." As our volunteers bring their whole selves to living lives of simplicity, service, justice, and prayer within community, they bravely uncover new aspects of these pillars. Through this discovery, God's spirit grows within their lives. We are blessed to journey with them and, as we listen with open and vulnerable hearts, allow their words to touch our lives as well.



*Note from the Director,
Shannon Curran*

It is with joy and appreciation that I welcome Andres Gomez to the staff of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Andres was hired in November for our brand new position of Site Leader. In this role, Andres accompanies our volunteers in their service and in community life. As he walks with our volunteers to uncover the many, many gifts which spring forth from a life centered in service, Andres will guide the volunteers' spiritual, personal, and professional growth. I am excited to witness how this new role and the accompaniment it brings will deepen our ministry.

I am so grateful to have been warmly welcomed by the BSVM team, the Sisters of Bon Secours, the volunteers, and the community in Baltimore. I couldn't be happier with all the guidance and support that the BSVM team has given me. I am inspired by the passion and devotion that the volunteers bring to their service each day and how they express the pillars of BSVM. I feel very connected to their mission and their love for the charism of the Sisters of Bon Secours. While I have previously worked with young adults in universities and community colleges, I think my experience working with the Sisters of Bon Secours in Peru and with vulnerable communities living on the margins is what really connects me to the volunteers in a special way.



~Andres Gomez



If the Shoe Fits...Wear It!

By Elizabeth Modde, 2015-2016 Volunteer
A graduate of Loyola University Chicago

“Combat boots or rain boots?” I ask Mackenzie as she slides on her flats. The five of us are at the front door about to set off for a night out. During this year of living simply, I have found many choices changed by my decision to live with less. My options are simplified for me now: should I wear my combat boots or rain boots with this skirt? Simple. Except that beyond selecting my pair of shoes lie two, complex questions. First, “How do I define myself?” and second, “How does that definition affect others?”

As I lace up the combat boots, deciding how to best tie them so they appear more feminine, or at least sort of pragmatically edgy, I feel silly. Uncertain of whom I might meet tonight, I have found myself defaulting to materials in order to feel more confident. Perhaps it is not so hard to imagine, seeking external confidence as a response to inner feelings of vulnerability. How might people judge me differently because of the combat boots? I have a feeling that similar insecurities must influence my neighbors when it comes to appearance. It may be easy to judge those who are economically poor for having a new cell phone or finished nails. However, I don't think their reasons for maintaining an image are much different from my motivation to buy a pair of nicer shoes for going out. Underlying looks, there is a motivation to fit in and to use material items to feel good about ourselves.

***“We must live simply
so that others may
simply live.”***

~ attributed to Mahatma Gandhi

This year, I am challenged to define what “enough” is and to live with it. Corresponding to discovery of the tangible enough, I have found myself turning inward to see myself as enough. What innate talents do I have which provide me with confidence? How can I love myself more deeply so that I find an inner peace, free from the judgments of others?

I hope that my cutting back in terms of fashion made a statement that night. If so, people might have glimpsed a truth shared by Gandhi, “We must live simply, so that others may simply live.”

Today, one of the first days of winter when we have had below freezing temperatures, I sent a woman home from the hospital wearing Crocs. It was all that we had in her size at the hospital's Good Help Clothing Closet, which I help manage. As I lifted the patient's dry, cracked feet to layer two pairs of socks, I hoped she would be warm enough.

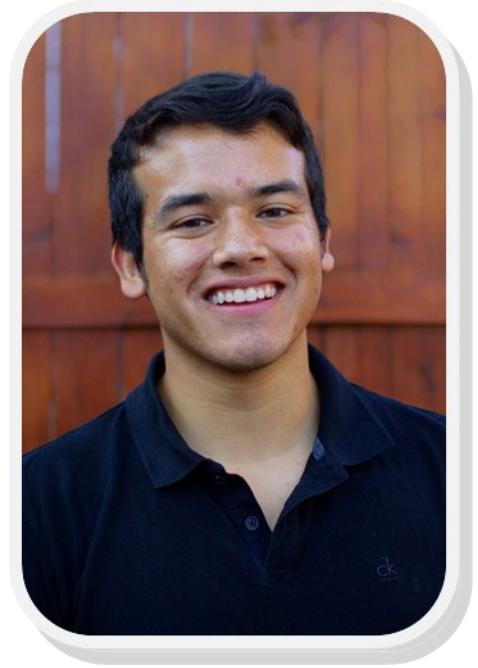
I will never fully understand the realities of what those in poverty must face. For this, I am grateful. I am grateful that my survival needs have always been met and that I have always had the tools to thrive. This being said, I must not ignore my privilege. The intentional choice to live more simply enables me to begin to live in solidarity with others. It says that others matter. My actions show that I will share our world's limited resources and that I respect the resources I mindfully choose to use.



Continued from page 1

One of the most important ways that balance has influenced my work this year has been through the types of relationships that I've formed with patients. In my role as a Patient Liaison in the St. Martin's Inpatient Unit, I spend time with many different patients trying to address as many of their needs as possible. I feel blessed for every interaction I get to have, but the work can be draining sometimes, especially since it's my first time working in a healthcare environment.

This week, a patient whose room I entered and exited probably 10 times in a 30-minute span, to get him snacks, crossword puzzles and information from his care providers, showed his gratitude by asking me a few simple questions about my life. It was a small gesture, but it meant so much. He seemed to be saying that if the roles were reversed and I was the one lying in that hospital bed, he would have done everything he could to help me too. After such conversations, I can't help but feel refreshed, recharged, and ready for whatever other obstacles I may encounter that day. Moments like these serve as testaments to the power of service done between two people who view the other as an equal. It is a balanced equation.



Gerard Ondrey

It is also necessary for me to balance when a patient's request is best addressed through a ministry of presence approach versus a more concrete action. For example, while I truly enjoy talking with and hearing the stories of patients, sometimes what a patient seems to need most is something more tangible. In these situations, giving the patient something simple like ChapStick or graham crackers can be the type of service that makes the patient most grateful. Sometimes this even opens the door for a longer interaction that may not have otherwise happened. These scenarios remind me how important it is to let each individual define his or her own needs. I strive to be an effective listener when talking with a patient, but a major part of my ministry involves realizing that a conversation may not be something the patient wants. In these cases, I must respect the patient's wishes.

I think the balance illustrated in these examples is crucial because it makes it impossible for me to fall into a savior complex, viewing service simply as one who has more giving to one who has less. That is an imbalanced ideology. When I have an interaction with a patient that feels balanced, it reminds me of a family. Members of a family seek to make their relationships reciprocal, with equal parts they give and take. Families also contribute to each other not only through emotional support and quality time, but through chores and other physical acts of service as well. The more I focus on balance, the more essential I feel it is to the definition of service because it allows me to approach what I'm doing as if I am serving my own family. And in the end, since the patients I work with are my brothers and sisters in Christ, I wouldn't want it to feel like anything else.



Left: Mackenzie Buss serves in the Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital Renal Department.

Alex Yeo's Rosemary Bread

Alex Yeo, a 2015-2016 volunteer and graduate of the College of the Holy Cross, enjoys sharing his gifts with BSVM as both cook and photographer. One of his specialties, rosemary bread, has become a popular treat for the volunteer community and guests alike. You see many of his photographs within this edition of *The Companion* as well.

“This year of service has given me the opportunity to further explore my interest in cooking. In the spirit of living simply, I decided to learn how to bake bread from scratch. It is an incredibly satisfying feeling to enjoy a freshly baked loaf of bread. This recipe for rosemary bread has become a favorite around the house!” ~Alex Yeo



Ingredients

1 tablespoon white sugar
1 cup warm water
1 (0.25 ounce) package active dry yeast
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons butter, softened
2 tablespoons rosemary
2 tablespoons oregano
3 cups bread flour
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 egg, beaten (optional)



Directions

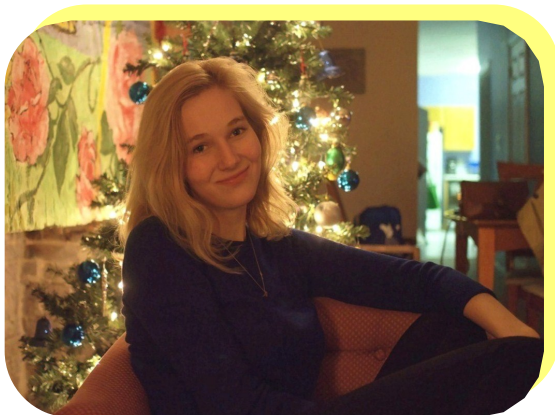
1. Dissolve the sugar in warm water in a medium bowl, and mix in the yeast. When yeast is bubbly, mix in salt, butter, 1-tablespoon rosemary, and oregano. Mix in 2 cups flour. Gradually add remaining flour to form a workable dough, and knead 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Coat the inside of a large bowl with olive oil. Place dough in bowl, cover, and allow to rise 1 hour in a warm location.
3. Punch down dough, and divide in half. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Lightly grease paper. Shape dough into 2 round loaves, and place on the baking sheet. Sprinkle with remaining rosemary. Cover, and allow to rise 1 hour, or until doubled in size.
4. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
5. Brush loaves with egg. Bake 15 to 20 minutes in the preheated oven or until golden brown.

Source: <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/89376/delicious-rosemary-bread/>



Elizabeth Modde and Nicole Odium enjoy cooking as well!

Meet Mackenzie Buss



Nicole and Mackenzie Christmas 2015



What is your favorite movie?

I can unashamedly say, the 2005 rendition of *Pride and Prejudice*. Between the idyllic English countryside backdrop, the incomparably gorgeous soundtrack and Kiera Knightley's cheekbones, it's a masterpiece.

What is your favorite book?

Kind of an impossible question. There are so many fantastic books out there I get giddy just thinking about it. But if you're forcing me to choose I'd say *Anna Karenina*. It somehow couples captivating romantic narratives with oodles of profound philosophical musings, essentially my dream combination.

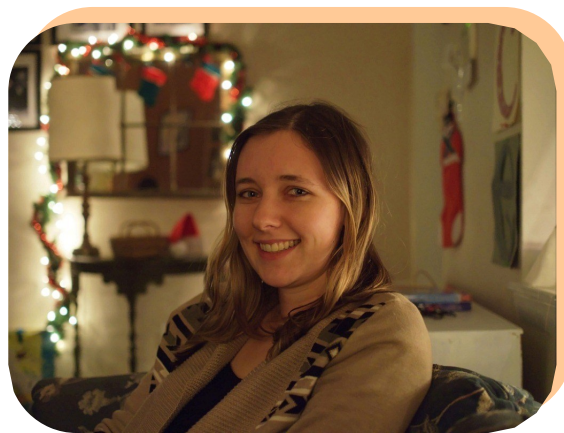
What is your favorite food?

Probably perfectly ripe avocado. Or maybe fresh mozzarella. Or blueberries! I love blueberries.

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

My baby brother Felix. He's 14 months old and just the most precious dollop of human you've ever seen. Unfortunately he only says about eight words at the moment. But if he had the entire English language at his disposal, I am certain a conversation with him would be brimming with childlike wisdom and hilarity.

Meet Nicole Odlum



What is your favorite book?

Tattoos on the Heart by Father Gregory Boyle is my favorite book. It is an inspiring and heartbreaking story of how one person can make such a huge difference in the lives of people that are involved in so much violence and despair. Father Boyle started one of the most successful gang intervention programs in East Los Angeles. Through the stories in his book, he shows the power that love and faith can have on people.

Do you have a hidden talent?

I know how to speak a little bit of German, but I can understand most of it.

What is your favorite food?

My mom's homemade spätzle.

If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be and why?

I would talk to Ellen DeGeneres because I think we could have a meaningful conversation, while still finding opportunities to laugh and have fun.

Reflections on the Freddie Gray Case and the Civil Unrest of April 2015



2014-2015 BSVM Volunteer Community

Left to Right:

Co'Dale Cook, Andrew McAsey, August Kunkel
Alexis DiGasso, Meghan Krueger

As the trials of the six officers charged with the death of Freddie Gray continue, our city of Baltimore revisits the injustices and strong emotions that boiled to the surface in April of 2015. During that time of civil unrest, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry reflected on how we might deepen our compassionate, healing, and liberating presence within our neighborhood. We continue to be committed to our service of presence in West Baltimore because, as our 2014-2015 volunteer community so poignantly wrote, "...the reason the riots happened is the reason we are here in the first place."

Below is an excerpt from a letter the 2014-2015 community wrote to our current 2015-2016 community. We wish to share the thoughts and feelings that arose when our 2014-2015 volunteers took time to listen and reflect upon their own experiences and to the reality of their neighbors' pain.

In the days and weeks following the riots we began reflecting and talking about what had unfolded. We were outraged and saddened that the people of Baltimore could riot and destroy their own community. We were scared that the rioters and protesters might march down our street. We were saddened by the death of Freddie Gray. We were angered that police brutality is all too common in our neighborhood. Ultimately, we were disappointed that a community we have come to love and be a part of was now "living up" to the reasons that others tend to avoid it. As a community, we found ourselves trying to make sense out of what was happening, but the noise of "figuring it out" prevented us from hearing the needs of one another, those within our immediate household as well as those in our greater West Baltimore neighborhood.

...we came to the conclusion that the reason the riots happened is the reason we are here in the first place.

Amidst trying to figure all of this out, our Director posed a question that shifted our focus from formulating answers, to listening for them.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "a riot is the language of the unheard". In light of this, we were challenged to ask what was really being said by those who participated in the riots. Through discussions with coworkers, conversations with parents, and media coverage of the topic, it was apparent that, for the most part, there was a failure to ask why the unrest had happened in the first place. Did the rioters just lash out because of the tragic, unjust death of one of their neighbors? That might be reason enough. But we realized that it was much more than that. It was an outcry for justice.

In the days following the events that took place, we embraced the opportunity to practice listening by being active in our community; we participated in a potluck dinner just a few blocks down the road, attended a community meeting led by a prominent activist, and continued with our daily work routines. Our home was and continues to be a safe place for us to process our thoughts and feelings about what was taking place. After coming to appreciate that listening was integral to this processing, we came to the conclusion that the reason the riots happened is the reason we are here in the first place.

We might not understand what it means to be permanent residents of Baltimore but we are called to be lights for this community. You are called, as you enter into your year of service, to continue these flames for justice and peace through love.

BSVM Volunteers Share the Love Thanksgiving and Christmas 2015



Mackenzie, Nicole, Alex, Gerard, and Elizabeth celebrate their homemade Thanksgiving meal.



BSVM Volunteers share the holiday spirit!



The BSVM community enjoys trimming the tree.



“It was the night before Christmas and all through the house...”

Right: Our volunteers spend Thanksgiving together and make memories that will last!



Alumni Corner

Book Recommendations and Critiques



Review of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* By Patrick O'Neil, BSVM 2013-2014

"To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease. The nakedness is not an error, nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear."

This excerpt, from the brutally honest and unsettling *Between the World and Me* by Baltimore native Ta-Nehisi Coates, gives a brief look into the world in which many black Americans live today. The book is written as a letter from Coates to his 15-year-old son in an attempt to explain the forces that govern his actions and beliefs as a black American citizen. Coates describes most Americans as "Dreamers" who recognize the race issues this country faces yet choose to ignore them in the hope that they will build a successful life for themselves, often at the expense of black Americans.

Coates doesn't provide solutions to race relations; rather, he issues indictments regarding the implicit "destruction of the black body" that informs many of the policies and laws that exist in America today. This quick read will undoubtedly force you to question the insidious forces that continue to plague the lives of black Americans to this day.

Review of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* By Sarah Ceponis, BSVM 2011-2012

As I sat down and read Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, I was both devastated and delighted to realize his book enables all of us to, deeply and uncomfortably, understand the plight of poverty. Stevenson is a lawyer - a social justice lawyer - whose work in law school with prisoners on death row led him to create a now thriving nonprofit called the Equal Justice Initiative. Since its founding, EJI, led by Stevenson, has worked tirelessly to remind the world of the humanness in every individual, even those who have been accused of committing crimes. Stevenson's book delves into the incredibly biased and broken criminal justice system, and reminds us just how little "justice" is really served.



Stevenson profiles dozens of wrongly or unfairly convicted individuals and breaks hearts by telling their stories. He asks readers to consider the teenager sentenced to death row for a robbery gone wrong and the falsely accused man who spends so long in a poorly equipped prison he goes blind. *Just Mercy* brings to harsh, glaring light what so many of us learned during our Bon Secours year but are not necessarily able to articulate with as much grace as Stevenson; the opposite of poverty is not wealth, he tells us, but justice.

When I'm asked to explain my year as a Bon Secours volunteer, I find that my response varies depending on my audience. Sometimes I gush; sometimes I am guarded. Sometimes my voice cracks in despair or gratitude; sometimes I feign nonchalance. The reason for my mercurial replies? Sometimes, I just don't have faith that anyone else will really understand. Luckily, Stevenson's breathtaking and heartrending book gives me something to hold onto and something to pass on. It is impossible to read *Just Mercy* and not understand. Sitting down with this book asks us to contemplate brokenness, our own and our world's, and standing up from it asks us - demands us really - to open our hearts and minds to mercy.

First Alumni Retreat October 23-25, 2015

In October of 2015, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry was excited to introduce our first Alumni Retreat. Members of the our alumni community met at the volunteer house on South Mount Street to pray, reflect, share, and have fun together. Our current volunteer community did a fantastic job hosting by providing meals and preparing the space. Joy Aker facilitated the gathering, offering guidance and support. The retreatants were also blessed by the presence of the Sisters of Bon Secours, who joined the group for a prayer service and the dedication of the mosaic. Below, alumni share about their retreat experience.

"I felt very peaceful and joyful. I absolutely loved seeing everyone again, and especially meeting other past alumni and current volunteers. It was a nice reminder to reflect."

"The retreat came at a time when I was really stressed and trying to figure out what to do in the coming year, so the retreat was a welcome reminder to slow down and trust God and others. It was also a chance to be reminded of what my year with BSVM meant to me, and I very quickly felt like a part of a community again."

"I felt relieved to hear that many people were having the same struggles that I deal with, and that I don't need to make massive changes in my life to make more time and room for God in my day-to-day life."

"The two biggest highlights of the retreat were getting to know other former volunteers and to hear their stories, struggles and triumphs. And to be able to pray together and be reminded of what that can do for me."

"I really appreciated the retreat and being able to meet other former volunteers. It was a great time to remind myself of the many things I learned during my year with BSVM."

"I was so impressed with the current volunteers and their hospitality. The food they cooked was delicious and they were always ready to make us all feel comfortable and taken care of."

If you are a member of the BSVM alumni community and wish to join us for our next retreat, stay tuned. We will soon announce the date of our next Alumni Retreat.



**Alicia Manteiga (2008-2009) and
Crystal Truong (2008-2009)**

**Left to Right: Danielle Hickman (2012-2013)
Joy Aker (facilitator), Meghan Krueger (2014-2015)
Patrick O'Neil (2013-2014)**



Where Two or Three are Gathered in My Name, There I Am in Your Midst ~Matthew 18:20

By Sr. Alice Talone, CBS



The weekend of October 23-25, 2015, BSVM held an Alumni Retreat at their home on South Mount Street. The Bon Secours Sisters were invited for prayer and dinner on Saturday. I was delighted to be with the retreatants and several other sisters. It was great to see some of our former volunteers, visit with them, and hear how they were doing since they left the program.

During our time at the retreat, a meaningful prayer service was held to dedicate a mosaic created in the summer of 2015 in memory of a young neighbor senselessly killed. We were united in God's spirit as we prayed in front of the beautiful mosaic, offering prayers for our neighbor and for all victims of violence. Rain drops sent us into the house where we were to continue our prayer service. I was very moved by the sharing as we broke open the Word and shared bread. God's presence was among us and within us during this sacred time together. Yes, there God was in our midst! After prayer, dinner was shared. We truly knew the BSVM community even more through this meaningful time!

I am so overwhelmed by our BSVM Volunteers both past and present! These young women and men who come to Baltimore give of themselves in so many ways as they live out our Bon Secours charism. Each year, the volunteers grow together as a community. They form Christ-like bonds which, I sense, they carry with them as they live out being good help to those in need.



"...the creation of the mosaic was a prayer for an end to violence, and its angelic depiction and use of fragments of glass are a reminder of the fragility of life."

~ Meghan Krueger, BSVM 2014-2015



**Left to Right: August Kunkel, Andrew McAsey, BSVM 2014-2015
and Lauren Siegel (Staff Member of Mosaic Makers)
help to create the mosaic.
Summer 2015**



SISTERS OF BON SECOURS USA
 Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
 1525 Marriottsville Road
 Marriottsville, MD 21104

Non Profit Org
 US Postage
 PAID
 Ellicott City, MD
 Permit #6

Cover Photo From Left to Right

Elizabeth Modde
 Gerard Ondrey

Photographer: Andres Gomez, Site Leader

BSVM would like to express our gratitude to Mosaic Makers for guiding us in creating the Oscar Torres Memorial Mosaic.

mosaicmakers.org

BSVM Advisory Board:

Seán Bray

Director of Campus Ministry
 Loyola University of Maryland

Judith Carmichael

Director, Marketing and Public Relations
 Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital

Sarah Ceponis

BSVM Volunteer 2011-2012
 Johns Hopkins, MPH 2015
 After School Director, Govans Elementary

Sr. Elaine Davia, CBS

Director of Formation

Eve DeVaro

Director, Patient Advocacy
 Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital

Katie Mulembe

Coordinator of Recruitment and Alumni Relations, Catholic Volunteer Network

Amy Nee

Catholic Worker

Patrick Range

Affiliate Faculty Member,
 Loyola University of Maryland
 MSW Student, University of Maryland

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