

THE COMPANION

The newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Summer 2017

Issue 22



Living Simply and Loving Simplicity

By Amanda Scanameo, 2016-2017 Volunteer
A graduate of Marian University



When I learned about Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, I assumed that “living simply” was a nice way of saying, “We won’t be paying you much this year!” As I had never been paid to volunteer before, I thought the stipend was fair, even generous. I assumed all of my basic needs would be met (and they have actually been exceeded). My experience of simplicity during my time with BSVM has led me to understand that it means much more than living on a budget. At first, living simply seemed like a deprivation, but as the year progressed, I found it to be liberating. This year has given me the opportunity to stop and think about how I live, assess what I truly “need,” and give meaning to the mundane by practicing intentionality each day.

This practice of intentionality began immediately upon moving to Baltimore. I brought only the essential items that fit into my two suitcases. Leaving most of my belongings at home helped me to realize that having a lot of ‘stuff’ is not as important to me as I had once thought. Now I have a renewed sense of appreciation for my belongings, focusing on quality over quantity. I also try to be more intentional about my consumption. This is challenging while living in a society where almost everything is disposable. The small changes I have made in my life include living without Wi-Fi, swapping paper towels for actual towels, and sharing a car with five other people. These changes in habit have helped me to clear out the clutter in my life (both figurative and literal) and to make room for the things that really matter: God and others.

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



In this issue of *The Companion*, Zachary and Amanda share insights about the unseen, yet deeply felt, links of relationship that connect us all. They both speak of visible ways in which these bonds are strengthened, citing concrete actions we can take in our daily lives to strengthen communal bonds.

Recently, I have reflected on the sacrifices people make, or choose not to make, to sustain communal relationships. It is through intentional efforts that communities are fed. I have begun to notice choices of a close friend that continually enable her to stay in relationship with people who are quite different from herself. It is inspiring to watch her express love within very challenging relational dynamics.

As you read this issue, I invite you to walk with Amanda and Zachary as they explore how living simply and fostering one's spiritual life sustains relationships. You may also take this opportunity to reflect upon your participation within communal relationships. How have you made choices to foster relationships that feed community?

I hope that you find inspiration while reading the feature below. As Marie Truffer, BSVM's Administrative Assistant of 17 years recently retired; we take time to appreciate the ways she expressed her dedication to communal relationships. BSVM Director, Shannon Curran, shares her memories of Marie.

Whether through a kind word, a compassionate question, a cool glass of water that would mysteriously show up on my desk, or a chocolate bar left on my chair after a difficult meeting, Marie has lifted and cared for my spirit in many, many ways.

As you can guess, these little touches of love and light that Marie offered weren't required...This sense of awareness is one of the many ways that Marie consistently shared her care for the volunteers, for me, and for our new staff...over the years, she has created a lot of light.

Marie, you have offered peace. You have brought smiles. You offered words of healing. You have loved. For this and for your service and work to Volunteer Ministry these many years, we are deeply grateful.

~Excerpts from Shannon Curran's Retirement Luncheon Address



Friends and family celebrate at Marie's retirement party.



Left to Right: Eileen Kiefer, 1999-2005 BSVM Director, Marie Truffer, Shannon Curran, Current BSVM Director

Living simply, I find that I have less to distract me from God and more time to focus on my faith and cultivate a relationship with God. I also have more time for self-care. I do not have a lot of extra money to spend on things like manicures and massages, but I *do* have more time to get a full night's sleep, exercise (running is free!), and cook healthy meals. I make time for things I enjoy, such as drawing, crocheting, and reading. And most importantly, I have fewer time-related excuses to keep me from going to Mass, journaling, and spending time with God. Caring for my physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being is a new priority of mine and has put me in a much better position to serve patients in my service site.

It is this awareness of how my choices affect others that makes living simply a broader decision than simply balancing my budget; it also becomes a matter of how I spend my time, and how that affects those I encounter at my service site and in my community. The recognition that my life affects others was part of my initial motivation to do a year of service with BSVM. I wanted to be challenged and to grow personally and professionally. I imagined that, through my service in the Renal Department, I would be focusing on defeating the poverty in patients' lives--and yes, part of my job is to help connect patients to resources in terms of nutrition, shelter, and transportation (though it's more like scoring a point as opposed to winning the whole game). I was surprised to find that the biggest part of my job is to help fill a mutual need for companionship and connection. Living simply has created a space within me, a space that allows me to listen more deeply and to share in the experiences of others.

Every day at work I have the joy of getting to know the patients I serve. Many are eager to share their life stories, and I am eager to listen and learn, in turn. What I have found is that despite all of the differences on the surface, my naive, spring-chicken self has a lot in common with the weathered adults that I serve each day. We have a common human dignity. We share basic needs, like the need to eat and the desire for companionship. We also have some very different needs. My patients need to have their blood filtered by a machine three days each week. Many of them reflect wistfully on the past and wish they had taken better care of themselves; as someone who has made mistakes before (haven't we all?), I can relate. I mourn their loss of independence. I do my best to acknowledge the struggles they face with genuine empathy, to highlight the joy and strength that I hear in their stories, and to remind them of how amazing they are. I strive to practice a ministry of presence: listening attentively, speaking genuinely, and feeling deeply with those I am privileged to encounter. Again, living simply has cut out the distractions that inhibit relationship-building. By living simply, I am able to be truly present.

The Sisters of Bon Secours care deeply for the environment and the people it supports, both present and future. I chose this program because I feel the same way. Myself and the Sisters of Bon Secours believe that it is our responsibility to, "Live simply so that others may simply live!" This phrase has been attributed to Elizabeth Ann Seton, Ghandi, and Mother Teresa. Regardless of who said it, this quote speaks a truth that resonates in every corner of the world. Each and every one of us is created by God, bearing the same image and likeness and carrying the same human dignity. Living simply has enabled me to conceptualize how my life is intertwined with that of everyone I meet - as well as everyone I don't - through our common Creator and through the Earth, our home and the source of our sustenance.



2016-2017 BSVM volunteers have all learned to crochet, making hats to be distributed to those in need.



Faith Yusko takes a moment to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

Meet Maria Shibatsuji

Describe an influential experience that led you to a year of service.

My involvement in Marians Service Organization at LMU significantly influenced my decision to engage in a year of service. Through Marians, I engaged in weekly service at a transitional housing program and developed friendships with mothers and children who were experiencing homelessness. Marians taught me about the interconnectedness of social justice issues and being in solidarity with those who are marginalized from our society. I knew I wanted to continue to deepen my understanding of social justice issues after graduating and have an opportunity to be engaged in service full-time.



What is a favorite family memory? Why?

My favorite family memory is of a family trip on a Disney Cruise. I was in elementary school at the time. While I've been on many more family vacations since then, this will always be one of my favorite memories because I love how I saw the world as so magical and beautiful when I was this age. I'm grateful that my parents took me and my brother on this cruise because it created my life-long love for Disney and my search to continue to find magic and beauty in my daily life.

What do you enjoy doing during your free time?

I love to read and practice yoga during my free time. I also enjoy hiking, exploring second-hand bookstores, and having insightful conversations with friends.

Meet Faith Yusko

Describe an influential experience that led you to a year of service.

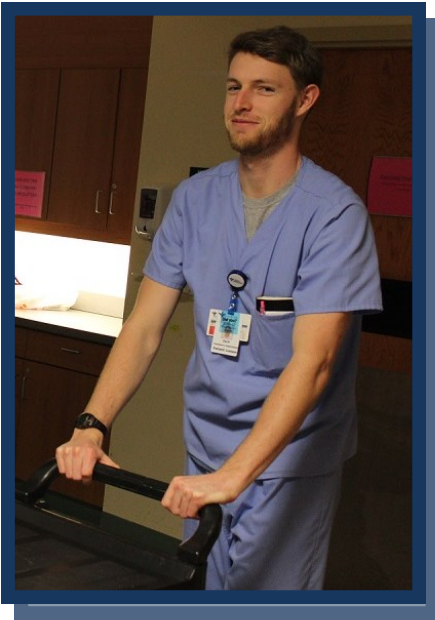
Backpacking through Europe led to my desire to do a year of service. Before going to Europe, I had gone on service trips to Guatemala and to Louisiana. I already had a love for service, but it was not something I had intended to incorporate into my life until my solo backpacking experience.

As I was traveling, I would stop at grocery stores rather than spending more money to go to restaurants on my own. During my travels, I would often share the food I bought with people I met who were experiencing homelessness. Even when there was a language barrier between us, I made wonderful connections with the people I encountered and saw God in their faces. Practicing this sharing was something that was easily incorporated into my journey and it was a way for me to put my faith into action.

I learned that service does not have to be a monumental sacrifice that throws your entire life off balance. Service is a conscious decision to help our brothers and sisters through multiple small actions that can have a large impact. Realizing that these small acts of love were part of my love of service, I wanted to find an organization that would foster that desire to serve while teaching me more ways to share the gifts God has given me. So far I've learned that a year of service is a kick start to a life of service!



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Developing Community: Moving Closer to God by Drawing Closer to Each Other

By Zachary Wiley, 2016-2017 Volunteer
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

Community is a necessary part of the human condition. For most, the first community we know is family, which then extends gradually outward to extended family, neighborhood, church or parish, town, city, state, and nation. Many senses of community extend even beyond the nation, an example being the international and worldwide community of the Church. Members of a community are tied together by shared history, experience, place, belief, and often all of the above at once. Seeing as community is so essential to all of us, it is no wonder that it plays a large role in our religious ceremonies and beliefs. For example, as Christians we worship together, and we celebrate important events such as marriage and baptism not solitarily but surrounded by members

of our community. Therefore, one could say that community has an important interaction with religious belief, both supporting it and being supported *by* it.

In modern America many communities are hurting and broken. We see this most visibly in our neighborhood in West Baltimore. Abandoned houses and churches stand as testament to families and faith communities that used to be here, but no longer are. This is not to say that no one lives or goes to church here, because people still do, but simply to show that these community ties have weakened. And this is not constrained to inner city neighborhoods: communities across the country, rich and poor, are suffering from poverties and addictions. From what I have seen, I believe that these maladies are all intricately connected to the health, or lack thereof, of community ties and support. That is, communities are weakened when members, often through no fault of their own, are struggling to survive financially, emotionally, or spiritually, and weakened communities are then less able to respond to the demands caused by these challenges. Additionally, becoming a part of a strong community offers more than just material and emotional support: learning to live and empathize with others is instrumental in one's spiritual growth and relationship with God.

When I applied to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry I was excited about developing community, because of the importance of community in sharing experiences and creating a support network. In the months since I arrived in Baltimore, my understanding of what developing community really means has been broadened and deepened substantially beyond the rudimentary understanding I came in with. I have learned that challenges are an inherent part of a community, but that divisiveness is not. In order to live out this simple fact, I have had to adjust some of my own habits and ways of thinking, as I am sure my community members have done as well. To illustrate, in a single day our community organizes use of the car, gets ready for work, makes all of our own meals, and completes chores, ideally in a way that is fair to everyone. There are often challenges in carrying this out, but when our responses come from a place of love and trust then these challenges become sources of community growth rather than stumbling blocks. As examples of this, I think of a recent disagreement in the community that served to draw us closer together in greater understanding, and of when our community has offered support to individual members during difficult experiences. Specifically, I think of the support I have felt during the long and, at times, stressful medical school application process I have been going through this year.



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Who has modeled being ‘good help to those in need’ in your life? Describe why you are inspired by this person.

My grandmothers have each been wonderful examples of “good help to those in need” in their own unique ways. My dad’s mother, whom I call “Babcia,” (which is Polish for grandma,) is a woman who helps others through her gentle kindness. She incorporates the prayer intentions of others into her own prayers and has taught me a lot about how quality time and presence are acts of love. My mom’s mother, whom we all call “Nanababes” is fiercely strong and independent. She spends her time working in her parish’s outreach center and serving as a Eucharistic Minister. The energy Nanababes brings to those ministries is contagious and inspires me to serve my community as well. They share their gifts and are *great* help to all in need. My grandmas are both strong Christian women who inspire me to be a better person.



What do you enjoy doing during your free time?

I very much enjoy hiking, reading, crafting and finding dogs to pet in my free time!

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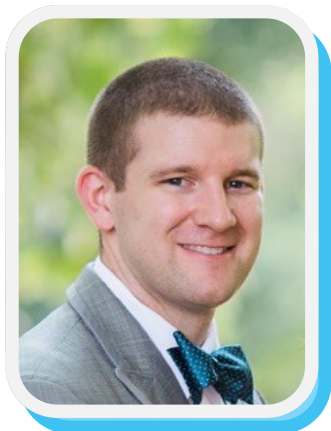


Zachary washes Celina’s foot during the Holy Thursday prayer service.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis paints a picture of purgatory as a dreary, sprawling, abandoned town in which no one can stand being around each other, so they keep moving away and out, further and further away from contact with others. They do not move away from each other out of fear, but rather out of a profound inability to coexist and understand the emotions and needs of others. The conscious decision to develop community is the opposite of this; it is the decision to live closely with others, accepting the occasional frustration and discomfort that this causes for the joy and sense of belonging that are repaid us for our efforts. This example also helps to illustrate that drawing closer to community draws one closer to God, and that a rightly ordered community is a glimpse of Heaven on Earth.

As we prepared for Lent this year, we discussed individual and collective challenges for this period of spiritual growth through simplicity and self-denial. Some specific ideas were limiting use of phones and social media, and adding time to pray as a community. There is a commonality between our approaches to Lent and to community life: challenging the self to become closer to God. In our little community in West Baltimore we build on our shared belief in the light of Christ, structuring our relationships in a way that draws us all closer to each other, and ultimately, to God.

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is blessed to be the “matchmaker” for Kyle Obendorf and his wife, Rebecca Obendorf (McCunniff), both 2012-2013 BSVM alums. Below, Kyle shares about the gifts he received from his year of service, citing his relationship with Rebecca as the most important blessing. We are deeply grateful that God’s love moves through BSVM, changing the lives of our volunteers in surprising and wonderful ways!



How did your experience with BSVM shape the years following your year of service?

After my year of service, I began work as a Patient Care Technician while I applied to PA school. I graduated from PA school at Wake Forest this past May, and now work in Family Medicine. Through it all, I have had a lot of contact with patients. My experience with BSVM helped shape my mission as a PCT, student, and Provider. I know that my interaction with patients is about more than just making correct diagnoses and treatment. To really do my job well, I must look at them as a whole person, take into account their living situation and past experiences, and come up with an approach that works for them.

What advice do you have to offer former volunteers as they continue to process their BSVM experience?

My advice would be to continue to let the experience change you. It is easy to get back into the routine of life and to become complacent and focused on other things. It takes diligence to apply what you have learned during the year of service to your daily life, and to let it inform your decisions and how you choose to live your life. It isn't easy, but keep working on self-reflection, prayer, and living simply, and you will continue to get the most out of the experience long after you leave BSVM.

What reading have you found to be informative, helpful and/or inspirational for volunteers in the BSVM formation or for those wishing to continue to explore the pillars of BSVM?

I really enjoyed reading [The Body Keeps the Score](#) by Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D. It talks about trauma and its effects on people. I think it helped put into perspective a lot of the behavior that I saw in the Emergency Department during my year of service. It has helped me to take a more compassionate approach with difficult patients who are hard to treat and are, at times, difficult to empathize with. This is a great read, especially for any volunteers or former volunteers interested in psychology, neurology, or working with high-risk patient populations.



2012-2013 BSVM community members join Kyle and Rebecca.
Left to Right: Julie McCracken, Eugene Kim, Kyle and Rebecca, Danielle Hickman

What were some of the gifts you received during your time of service?

My wonderful wife Rebecca, who is also a former volunteer, is definitely the best gift I received. To have shared that experience together set a great foundation for our marriage. Living simply, meal planning, praying together, and entering service-oriented careers were all made priorities for us in part because of BSVM. We continue to integrate these practices in our daily lives. Another gift from BSVM was that of gratitude. I feel blessed to have had the experience, and I try to practice gratitude so that I may keep a positive outlook on life and use my gifts to help others.

Good Times with BSVM!



March brought all kinds of weather to Baltimore! Celina took the opportunity to create this cute companion during one of the first and last significant snowfalls of the year.



Patient Experience Week at the Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital included a visit from some adorable, furry friends.



BSVM volunteers attend the Jazzin' It Up at the Park event, a fundraiser for the Sisters Academy of Baltimore.



BSVM volunteers embrace their veggies at the Bmore Healthy Expo.

Alumni Corner

BSVM Celebrates the Love!

Kari Kragness (BSVM 2010-2011) and Mitch Hoeft
August 12, 2016



Kari celebrates with her BSVM community member, Maia Bentz.

R: Yeti Olajide (BSVM 2013-2014) and Darion Haugabrook
September 8, 2016



L: Katie McDonald (BSVM 2011-2012) and Steve Won
May 21, 2016

Katie celebrates with her BSVM community member, Sarah Ceponis.



Nicole Campion (BSVM 2013-2014) and Papa Moussa Dialo
July 26, 2015



Andy McAsey (BSVM 2014 - 2015) and Margaret Shelledy
August 6, 2016

BSVM community members, August Kunkel and Co'Dale Cook, are included in the wedding party, back right.



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Holy Thursday Prayer Service

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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; Regina Fleck, Recruiter; Liesel Rupprecht, Program Coordinator