

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Late Summer 2017

Issue 23



A Piece in God's Mosaic

By Faith Yusko, 2016-2017 Volunteer
A Graduate of The University of Scranton



In the fast-paced world in which we live in, we are constantly being told that we need to achieve perfection and that we have to do it all on our own. My year of service with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry invited me to be a part of a countercultural movement that allows for the recognition and acceptance of my own brokenness, while practicing compassion, healing, and liberation through the experience of God's love.

Love of service has always been a part of me, and I knew I wanted to explore opportunities to do postgraduate service after completing my time at the University of Scranton. What I didn't realize was that, in addition to an opportunity to serve, I was also greatly in need of guidance in the development of my spiritual growth. I have always found wonderful faith-centered role models through my family, home parish, and the community at my Jesuit University, but I still felt stuck. I was so swamped with my schoolwork and with the anxieties that come along with transition that I became distracted and gave less time to talking with God. When I did pray, I felt like I was leaving voicemails for God and that I wasn't getting any calls back. I was frustrated by and ashamed of this disconnect, but I did not know how to strengthen my prayer life.

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Editor's Corner
Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



Each year, BSVM staff prayerfully work at supporting the volunteers as they are transformed through their year devoted to learning through service with others. This transformation may only occur if the volunteers allow their minds and hearts to open, creating a vulnerable space for God and their neighbor to enter their souls. One element of this space is gratitude. Gratitude is deeply vulnerable. When we express gratitude, we internalize the reality that all life is gift. The transformative moments of life, those of love freely given and received, are moments of freedom. We stand, hands open in gratitude, acknowledging our own strength and frailty.

As Faith and Abbi reflect on the completion of their year of service, they share with us the moments that most deeply affected them and express heartfelt gratitude for the love that they have received. The volunteers complete their year by taking a vulnerable stance towards their experience with BSVM. It is our hope that the volunteers live in a space of gratitude and vulnerability as they continue on their life's journeys. We also hope that, as you read this issue of *The Companion* and are drawn into the volunteers' experiences, you too will courageously say a prayerful thank you for all the blessings in your life. Let us remember that a life lived in vulnerable acceptance of God's gifts is a life lived in hope and joy.



Introduction to Liesel Rupprecht
New Program Coordinator

As I begin my new role as Program Coordinator for Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry and for Bon Secours Associates, I would like to thank everyone for the warm welcome. It is truly a blessing to be here and to serve two important ministries of the Sisters of Bon Secours. My background includes over 15 years of event management experience for both the profit and non-profit sectors. This experience will prove beneficial as I manage multiple projects for each ministry. I look forward to meeting and working with the entire BSVM community and to supporting our mission to be "Good Help to Those in Need."

Moving to Baltimore and being a part of BSVM jump started my faith life. Living and growing in community with 5 young people who wanted to prioritize faith and service in their lives was exactly what I needed to continue to develop my spiritual life. We each had doubts, questions, and different styles of praying, but we also learned from and with one another. I have never felt ashamed about what I did not know while continuing my faith education here. My community members shared their knowledge and encouraged me to read more books about theology and spirituality, including ones that I shied away from in the past. Each day during my year of service, I learned more and more about what it means to live a truly Christian life through the examples of the Sisters of Bon Secours, the supportive Volunteer Ministry Staff, and my fellow community members. I grew greatly through spiritual direction or spiritual companionship, as my spiritual director, Joy, calls it. Each of these opportunities to continue my faith formation has been a gift to me.

Serving in the Family Support Center has presented me with lessons in developing my relationship with God as well. I worked alongside Child Development Teachers and Foster Grandmas every day as we served the children and families that came into the center. I like to brag that I had the best placement site because I got to run around and play with children all day long! I experienced God's love through the hugs and giggles of my kids. I grew in patience and understanding through the tears I've dried and the boo-boos I've helped patch up. I've been able to praise God through simply living in the moment and dancing with the toddlers. The parents I worked for have shown me how incredibly resilient they are through the stories that they shared about the injustices they face. They inspired me to want to continue to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who face injustice so that we can all work to recognize and maintain each person's dignity. Jesus' life is my model for walking with those who face injustice. We each need a community of support to remind us that, even in our imperfect state, we are worthy of trying to follow in his footsteps to serve one another.

“Jesus’ life is my model for walking with those who face injustice.”



The most important lesson I have learned is about my own brokenness. I have learned that if I take the time to be honest with myself and recognize my brokenness, I can let go of the media-influenced obsession with being perfect and allow God to show me the beauty in life. God sees our brokenness not as a disqualifying fault, but as an opportunity to grow in relationship with him and the rest of creation. We are each a piece in God's mosaic, and our rough edges allow us to be a special piece in the work of art that God has created.

Faith helps a toddler adjust his shoes at the Bon Secours Family Support Center.

Meet Celina Santiago

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

My experience at Villanova University was very influential in my decision. Before my junior year, I heard for the first time about postgraduate service and the various opportunities available. My roommate, a senior at the time, decided to defer medical school and apply to service programs. This planted the seed of interest within me. As a senior, I attended a service fair and was exposed to various programs. As service is a significant part of Villanova's Augustinian tradition, I continued the conversation with the campus ministry staff and was intrigued by their experiences. The application process was a huge help in my discernment. After completing the process, I felt certain that I was being called to serve. I went on an educational service and justice experience to Selma, Alabama. That week of learning and serving alongside others fostered my desire to seek opportunities to engage in service learning within a community. I am glad I listened to the call to serve as I have definitely learned a great deal about injustice, disparities, and compassionate presence during my year with BSVM!



Celina with Sr. Mary Rita Nangle.

If you could choose one vacation destination, where would you go and why?

I'd like to travel all over the world. I read an article highlighting 30 awesome places in various countries. I'd love to visit all of them! I would also like to travel to see the different parts of the U.S. When I spent a summer in Germany, I met many people who told me about their travels within the U.S. I realized I had not traveled much in my own country. I'd like to visit National Parks, see friends along the way, and maybe eat at some of the restaurants from the TV show Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives. My first trip might be to visit a friend in Colorado or I may visit Boston, which I have yet to see! During my year in Baltimore, I was finally able to check D.C. off my list!



Meet Amanda Scanameo

What influenced you to spend a year of service?

I had lots of great service experiences in college that formed me as a Christian and nudged me toward doing a year of service. One significant event was a social justice retreat that I helped lead in college. I formed close friendships with the other leaders and learned a lot about injustices that exist in the world. I also learned about the work that people are doing to empower our brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing these injustices. During the retreat, I spent a few days with other students learning about their passion for social justice, serving alongside them in the community, sharing my story, and reflecting on how the Holy Spirit moves in our lives. At the same time, I was taking a class called Religious

Perspectives on Social Issues. It involved a lot of reading and discussion about racial, gender, and economic injustice. Being involved with groups of people who care about social justice issues was inspiring and nurturing. I decided that living in an intentional community and exploring justice through prayer and service was something I wanted to pursue.

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Drinking the Cup of Life

By Abbi Cerezo, 2016-2017 Volunteer
A Graduate of Stonehill College

When I first stepped onto the St. Martin's Acute In-Patient Unit of Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital, I was overwhelmed. During my orientation of the unit, I saw doctors and nurses whizzing in and out of patients' rooms. I heard a cacophony of bells, alarms, and shouting, and I smelled the sharp and dizzying odor of urine and chemical cleaner. I knew that I could be awkward when meeting people for the first time so I was pretty terrified when I was told that I would be rounding on my own. What would I say? How could I connect with my patients? Already a naturally anxious person, these new worries filled my head, but with every interaction I had with a patient or staff member my worries subsided.

This year I was fortunate enough to stumble upon Henri Nouwen's book, *Can You Drink the Cup?* Nouwen describes the cup of life; it is filled with both good and bad. He states, "Life is full of gains and losses, joys and sorrows, ups and downs, but we do not have to live it alone." One of the most important things I have learned during my year of service is to drink from the existential cup of life of which Nouwen so beautifully writes.

At first, I found it difficult to cope with the things I saw and heard on the unit. Seeing patients' scars from bullets and knives and hearing their painful stories of poverty and abuse strongly affected me. I couldn't grasp why these terrible things were happening to people who were so kind and gentle. I held onto the darkness so strongly that I was unable to lift my eyes to the light. Using Nouwen's words as a guide, I was able to reflect more deeply on the stories of pain, as well as, the love and joy that I saw. God works in mysterious ways. I've seen that through my patients. I have experienced new life with them not only by bearing witness and walking with them through their suffering, but also by accompanying them in times of joy and happiness. I am grateful for all the intimate interactions we have shared and for the love that they have shown me.



Volunteer Abbi Cerezo and colleague at Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital.

I will never forget one woman in particular. She was an angel. Her appearance reminded me of Mother Teresa. I met her during a new admission round on the unit, and we immediately connected. She told me her stories of struggle and triumph, and always tried to teach me lessons about life. We both shared about our families and prayed for each other. At one point, both she and I did not think she would make it through her final procedure. I was distraught. This beautiful woman in front of me was declining and there was literally nothing I could do about it except stay with her during her time of pain and vulnerability. We held each other close during my visits, and we constantly told each other how much love we had for one another. I found myself struggling with the idea of losing her, but she didn't want me to despair. She told me to continue loving others as I had loved her and to keep shining my light into the darkness. Her encouraging and loving words brought tears to my eyes and made the situation even more painful. However, the relationship that we built, despite the sadness, was incredibly beautiful. I wrote about her quite frequently in my journal. One of the last times I saw her I wrote,

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“She said that she loved me and to never forget it. I won’t. I love her too. She’s given me so much inspiration and love. I’m so blessed that I had the chance to spend time with her.” I am grateful for having known this woman; she has made me a better person. I know that I can relish in both my love and pain for her, knowing that God brought us together for a reason.

One of the most important things I’ve learned through my service year is to accept and love myself the way that God made me. When I first started as a volunteer, I was filled with self-doubt and anxiety. I was applying to medical school late, I had almost no hospital experience prior to arriving in Baltimore, and I missed home. During my year with BSVM, I’ve learned to take each day one day at a time. I now fully embrace life and strive to live in the present moment. I also embrace the bad that I see, because it is in those moments that I rely on God the most. Experiencing both joys and pains on St. Martin’s, I now see how life-giving my year of service has been. I am grateful for the memories that I will take with me to medical school. I hope to learn to become a caring and compassionate physician and to continue to honor all the patients who have impacted me this year.



Abbi delivers reading material to patients.

“One of the most important things I’ve learned through my service year is to accept and love myself the way that God made me.”
- Abbi

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What do you enjoy doing during your free time?

Anything creative! This year, I’ve done some drawing and taught myself basic embroidery. Although I learned how to crochet from my mom, grandmother, and great-aunt, I hadn’t picked up a hook in years. This year, I’ve made blankets, boot cuffs, and snowflakes. My two favorite projects are the hats I crocheted with my community and our community blanket. Everyone worked on it. Both projects were made from leftover yarn donated by friends, family, and co-workers. This was a cool way to be sustainable and thrifty, while creating items for others. The community blanket is hideous, but I love it! I hope future volunteers enjoy it!



A sculpture by Amanda Scanameo.

Mackenzie Buss Alumni Profile (BSVM 2015-2016)

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

Even though my former community members and I are scattered across the country, the life lessons I learned with them continue to shape me immensely. I have a newfound intentional approach to roommate relationships, I am a better communicator, especially around difficult subjects, and I am more open to being vulnerable with others. Of course, I'm no expert and continue to struggle with these hallmark community skills, but my past experiences with Nicole, Alex, Elizabeth and Gerard give me the courage to take risks in new relationships. My BSVM community has already shown me how immensely rewarding and beautiful the challenging parts of relationships can ultimately be.

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

I seriously doubt I have any wisdom beyond that of what other BSVM alumni have to offer; the former volunteers I have met are a wildly insightful bunch! And I don't know if I think there is any advice I could give that would apply to everyone, really, we humans are all so different and what works for me might be different from what works for another! That being said, I know that taking the time to be alone with my thoughts, my feelings, my breathing, my journal, my bible, my Gustavo Gutierrez book, or whatever else, and to just be present before God has continued to be a wellspring of peace for me. Sometimes, I love to do this, and it happens naturally. Sometimes, I have no motivation to do it and unfortunately I don't. The ambivalence is incredibly real, but it really is like exercise for the soul; it's much like I feel about heading to the gym. I never regret sincerely taking time to be alone with God after I have done it. So I suppose that is what works for me, and it is a wonderful backdrop for processing and centering my daily living and my past experience as a BSVM volunteer.



Mackenzie and her brother Cooper at his wedding.

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?



Mackenzie and fellow community member Nicole Odum.

Well, Thomas Merton and Brother Lawrence are definitely my go-to reading recommendations for anyone looking for spiritually inspirational material, especially BSVM volunteers. However, since leaving Baltimore and coming to grad school, I have found a lot of wisdom in the writings of Gustavo Gutierrez around Liberation Theology. He carefully unpacks the theological and scriptural imperative for a Christian Preferential Option for the Poor, which obviously closely connects to the Bon Secours pillars and, I think, the personal values of many BSVM volunteers. These days, I spend much of my time in incredibly secular spaces that almost always have a very negative understanding of Christians (understandably so). Father Gutierrez's writings have helped me develop a language to communicate

with classmates, teachers, and colleagues who are incredibly invested in advocating for the marginalized but have come to know Christianity as something antithetical to social justice. Advocating for the human rights of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters is genuinely at the core of Christian life, and Father Gutierrez has helped me articulate that with others when a relevant opportunity arises.

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Scenes from the Closing Mass and Celebration



Clockwise from top left: Fr. Sam Lupico and Deacon Stephen Yusko bless the volunteers; Sr. Fran Gorsuch and Deacon Yusko administer Holy Communion; Volunteers receive prayer crosses from Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski; Bon Secours Sisters and volunteers; Fr. Lupico, Deacon Yusko and volunteers; Volunteer Maria Shibatsuji and Site Supervisor Joe Ann Murphy.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteer Celina Santiago and family; Site Supervisor Joe Ann Murphy (l) and BSVM Director Shannon Curran (r); Site leader Andres Gomez and volunteers; Director Shannon Curran and alumna Crystal Truong (BSVM 2008-2009); Volunteer Faith Yusko and co-workers.

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

I can't really do justice to all of the grace I received from God during my year of service. Being given four lifelong friends with whom I can confide, laugh, learn, and reflect is undoubtedly the biggest gift I received. It's been a full year since we ended our year of service in Baltimore and I still gush about my community, but the relationships I had with patients were an invaluable gift as well. They taught me about unconditional love, radical forgiveness, joyful resilience, and the power of simply holding someone's hand. Not to mention, I wouldn't be listening to Rachmoninoff's piano concertos, diligently crocheting cozy hats, or reading my new favorite poet, Khalil Gibran, without the creativity, encouragement, and enthusiasm of the renal patients. I still think of them daily and thank God for the gift of those relationships.



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Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

1525 Marriottsville Road

Marriottsville, MD 21104

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Cover Photo

Volunteers join hands in prayer at the closing Mass.

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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