

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Fall 2017

Issue 24



During the application process, BSVM carefully selects students that have begun to explore and build the foundation for a deeper understanding of our pillars. When asked the questions below, two of our new volunteers, Claire Kimilu and Elizabeth Tittle, responded by sharing their experiences of community as they reflect upon the relationships that led them to a year of service. We look forward to journeying with Claire and Elizabeth, and all members of the 2017-2018 community, as they both uncover and integrate the pillars of BSVM.

Which BSVM pillar speaks strongly to you and why? Describe an event or events in your life in which you have experienced this pillar.

I Am Because We Are

By Claire Kimilu, 2017 - 2018 Volunteer
A Graduate of Villanova University



There is a Bantu philosophy, “Ubuntu,” which simply states, “I am because we are.” Such a concept seems far-fetched in a society which places so much emphasis on individualism. So caught up in “I”—in who I want to become, or what I need to do—we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that we are in this life alone; when, in reality, we as individuals cannot exist in isolation. Each of us relies on others to flourish. With our humanity comes an inexplicable ability to connect with others. No matter our cultural background, we each have the capability of empathizing with

Continued on page 3

Editor's Corner
Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



This issue of *The Companion* is unique in the diverse voices you will hear. It is comprised of writings from BSVM community members connected with the community in a variety of ways. Claire Kimilu and Elizabeth Tittle, two of our newest members of BSVM, share life experiences that have led them to value the BSVM pillar, Develop Community. We are also blessed to receive submissions by both a member of the alumni community, Alexis DiGasso (BSVM 2014-2015) and David Ceponis, father of alumna, Sarah Ceponis (BSVM 2011-2012). As you can see, this newsletter is a community effort and we are deeply grateful for the community support!

A homily by Fr. Joe Muth inspired me to reflect upon BSVM's communal and prophetic voice in Southwest Baltimore. Through both present and past BSVM community members, God's voice cries out for peace and justice, just as the prophet Zechariah cried, "He will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the Earth." (1 Zechariah 9:10).

In his homily on 1 ZEC 9: 9-10, Fr. Joe Muth preached on the prophetic voice of God that each of us carries within us. It is a voice that cries out, through all of creation, for peace and growth toward love in the midst of darkness and violence.

Southwest Baltimore is filled with loving people, who, in the face of incredible suffering have the capacity for joy and faith in God. The suffering and violence is so heavy, it tests human resolve. All those living and serving in the neighborhood, working for change, struggle with this heaviness. How tempting it can be to give in and lose hope in the midst of such suffering.

In his homily, Father Joe spoke to this struggle. He acknowledged that the struggle is difficult and he strongly encouraged all those listening to continue on their path, serving with hope. He reminded us that we do not always see the change we work for in our lifetime, but that it is vitally important that we continue to be prophetic voices in times of darkness. The value of the prophetic voice is not only the change it brings; it is the presence of the voice itself. As we speak our desires for justice and love, those around us become accustomed to hearing our prophetic voices. When we are gone, this message will be passed to the next generation.

In joining BSVM, Claire and Elizabeth, and each one of the new 2017-2018 volunteers, continues our prophetic voice in Southwest Baltimore. This voice is a chorus of voices blending together to form a hopeful community; a community that grows as BSVM becomes directly connected to all those the volunteers love. As you read David Ceponis' article (Father of Sarah Ceponis BSVM 2011-2012), you will see how Sarah's experience with BSVM deeply affected members of her family. Each year, these types of connections enable BSVM's voice to speak to people and places beyond our local community. We trust that God has spoken, and will continue to speak, through us in prophetic ways that we cannot possibly imagine.

another if we remain open to those around us. A parent, whether here or in a foreign land, can fathom the depths of another's love for their children. Some fortunate to have a safe and stable home can understand the yearnings of those experiencing homelessness and hunger. And whether near or far, related or unrelated, each impacts the life of another. Who we are and how we live is largely dependent on our connection to others. Highlighted within the concept of "Ubuntu" is the BSVM pillar of community.

Though my story is just beginning, I am already struck by the many characters who have enriched my life. These characters are a part of my community; a community made up of people from all walks of life. My story began with my grandma in Kenya. Working as a rural farmer, through selfless and compassionate action, she taught me that we are all capable of touching others in ways that transcend our own lives. Far beyond her time on this earth, her story continues in the many people who bear witness to her generosity, and it is my own desire to do likewise.

My story of community continues with my first pediatrician, Dr. Craig. In her, I first recognized the curative power of personal connection. From the moment I met Dr. Craig, I knew that I wanted to be just like her, but it was not her fancy white coat or stethoscope which drew me to medicine. It was something much deeper. It was her ability to see the patient rather than just the facts and figures of an illness. Beyond the physical, Dr. Craig had a way of healing on a spiritual level. These experiences with my grandma, Dr. Craig, and others—many who do not understand how profoundly they have touched me—have enkindled a passion for service through Public Health within me.

As I look forward to my year with BSVM, I am excited to continue my story by developing community life within Southwest Baltimore and exploring my interest in Public Health. I hope that this year of service will better expose me to the needs and experiences of others. In opening my eyes to their needs, I hope to cultivate a deeper sense of empathy for my community members and to always remember that we cannot care for ourselves if we do not care for others.



A Never-Ending Desire for Unitas , Veritas, and Caritas

By Elizabeth Tittle, 2017 - 2018 Volunteer

A Graduate of Villanova University

I believe that each and every one of my service experiences, and the relationships that I have developed during these experiences, have helped pave the way to my decision to pursue a year of service with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. However, there is one relationship that has truly been my shining light these past two years. It inspired me to want to learn more about service learning, community, social injustice, and ultimately to apply for a year of service with BSVM. That relationship is with Katrine, a recent Villanova graduate who was my advisor for a week long school Habitat for Humanity trip to Thibodaux, Louisiana.

The week that I spent with the Bayou Area Habitat chapter in Thibodaux holds a special place in my heart for numerous reasons. First, I spent the week working, serving, and forming relationships with a community that was about an hour outside of New Orleans. New Orleans is where I lived my entire life prior to attending Villanova. Secondly, it was the first time that I had facilitated extensive conversations and dialogues about complex topics such as stereotyping, racial relations, and class dynamics. Most importantly, Thibodaux is special to me because it was the first time that I really felt my heart set on fire by the service learning I was participating in. This image is a signature image of Villanova. The flaming heart appears on the university seal and is a representation of the flaming heart of St. Augustine and his passion to search to know God and to love others.

Continued on page 9



Commissioning Statement *Shannon Curran* *Director, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry*

Delivered to the 2017-2018 volunteers at their commissioning on September 7th.

As I looked over today's gospel reading, Luke 5:1-11, I envisioned the volunteers in a boat together. I saw them in a boat together in deep water. I'd say that is a pretty accurate vision. Volunteers, because of your commitment to community, you are in this together. Because of our location in West Baltimore, you are in deep water.

From Luke's gospel today, we learn that when the disciples lower their nets without Christ, they catch nothing. No matter how hard they work, they catch nothing.

Yet, when Christ is in the boat with them and they act after listening to Christ, they catch so many fish that their boat, actually multiple boats, "are in danger of sinking" (Lk. 5:7).

Volunteers, you may be in deep water but, as we discussed last week, because there is deep need here, God is deeply present here.

While you may be in a boat together and you may be in deep water, you are not alone.

You've already taken the risk to say yes to this commitment. You took another risk to actually get on that plane or get in the car and come here. Your parents took the risk when they dropped you off, when they let you go.

With your commissioning today, we ask you to continue that "yes." We ask you to say yes to Christ's invitation to accompany you in service in this deep water. We ask you to move over in your boat and let Christ into your community. We ask you to try acting or serving after listening to Christ.

The gospel tells us that those yesses will lead to abundance. We are all here with you because, in some way or to some degree, we've experienced that abundance and we are happy to have you with us. We are excited that you are here and we celebrate this good news that yes, God is here. And, yes, we can find abundance even within deep need.

We gather today to celebrate the good news, to celebrate you and the start of your journey this year.

With this commissioning, we give witness that you are not alone.

"...we celebrate this good news that yes, God is here. And, yes, we can find abundance even within deep need."



Commissioning Mass September 2017



Clockwise from top left: BSVM was blessed with the presence of Sr. Elaine Davia, C.B.S.; Volunteer Sam Ting and Sr. Elaine Davia celebrate with a hug; Thank you, Fr. Sam Lupico for bringing your love and passion for service to our Commissioning Mass.

2017- 2018 BSVM Volunteers



Elizabeth Tittle
Villanova University

Family Support Center
Bon Secours
Community Works



Claire Kimilu
Villanova University

Behavioral Health
Bon Secours
Baltimore Hospital



Beatriz Cuevas
Stanford University

Renal Department
Bon Secours
Baltimore Hospital



Narda Salinas
St. Edward's University

Family Health
and Wellness
Bon Secours
Baltimore Hospital



Ruby May Miller
Stonehill College

Tele-Heart Program
Bon Secours
Baltimore Hospital



Sam Ting
Loyola Marymount
University

Patient Advocacy and
Service Excellence
Bon Secours
Baltimore Hospital

Alexis DiGasso Alumni Profile (BSVM 2014-2015)

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

My experience with BSVM was extremely influential in shaping my current path and life trajectory. Despite applying to graduate school during my volunteer year, I continued to be unsure about what my next steps in life should be. Over the course of my year in the Family Support Center's Child Development Room, I came to recognize the developmental and emotional difficulties of some of the students with whom I worked. After recognizing these challenges, I felt defeated by my efforts to find appropriate psychological supports, assessments, and interventions for my students. Through taking a course on disparities in mental health, I learned why it was that I could not find adequate screening measures or interventions. This knowledge further empowered me to become a child psychologist. I now seek to gain the skills needed to provide appropriate interventions to help disadvantaged young children reach developmental milestones and lead healthy lives.



Alexis at the Bon Secours Family Support Center.



Left to right: Candice Fairchild (Family Support Center Staff), Sarah Ceponis (BSVM 2011-2012), Meghan Krueger (BSVM '14-'15) and Alexis DiGasso.

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

I, myself, am continuing to process my own BSVM experience, and am certain that I will continue this work for the rest of my life. My time in BSVM was particularly influential because of the time I spent reflecting and being present during my year of service. Now, it is more difficult to find time to continue processing, but in the most unexpected moments I find myself coming to new realizations. My advice to former volunteers is to tune in to those quieter, unexpected moments and to relish in the memories and experiences of the time we spent in Baltimore.

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?

One book that allowed me to continue my BSVM formation is *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This novel provided me with a different perspective of being black in the US, as told by an African woman. During my time in Baltimore, I gained a greater understanding of racism in the US, and through this book I was provided the opportunity to expand my prior beliefs and add complexity and depth to my understanding. I believe this deeper understanding of injustice has allowed me to continue examining the ways in which I can practice God's justice and best serve others.

Continued on page 7

A Father's Reflection

By David Ceponis

*David Ceponis, father of Sarah Ceponis (BSVM 2011-2012), has been a faithful reader of **The Companion** for years. Below, he reflects on his daughter's year of service. He beautifully articulates how BSVM impacted, and continues to impact, the life of both Sarah and her family. We are extremely grateful for this thoughtful reflection.*

As Sarah progressed through her volunteer year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, Peggy (her mom) and I became increasingly aware of the depth and breadth of her work. This was not merely an extended high school mission trip. Sarah's work in a challenged, inner-city, Baltimore neighborhood, was truly a labor of love, sacrifice, and enduring commitment. Along with the other Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry community members, she and her peers lived out the Gospel message by immersing themselves in the lives of the people that they served.

This exercise was not a "we-they" interaction—"let's get our hands dirty and help out for awhile"—it was a deep-rooted, personal collaboration with disenfranchised families living in poverty. She lived, worked, and shared in their lives. Sarah's stories about her work animated my understanding of her emerging convictions and commitment to real social justice. She not only taught the children under her care and in her classroom; she became part of their lives, visiting their homes, befriending their mothers, finding books, crayons, and multiple resources to help them. Her efforts reminded me that compassion is best lived out by sharing in the trials and challenges of those in need, not merely intervening and then leaving.



David Ceponis, far right.

As Peggy and I observed the Bon Secours year unfold, our own sensibilities about the poor and underprivileged expanded. We recognized the pure joy Sarah was experiencing in her work. I learned to laugh as Sarah related the fun of weekly shopping expeditions in which the volunteers learned to live simply. I also enjoyed hearing her stories of the volunteers sharing one aging car. This amazed me! Sarah's moving accounts of the many children in her life (and their mom's) shook my understanding of life in an underprivileged neighborhood to the core. I contemplated how little I knew about the day-to-day difficulties people routinely face in a low-income, inner-city, neighborhood. I wondered out loud why God gave me and my family so many privileges and advantages relative to Sarah's "children" and families. But most of all, I thanked God for the special year my daughter was going through. It was cathartic for her and us. Her work with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry reminded me that life's greatest lessons are not taught in a classroom, but played out in how we live our lives. Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry was and is the perfect starting point for a life-long journey of service and commitment to serving the underprivileged.

Continued from "Alexis DiGasso Alumni Profile (BSVM 2014-2015)" on page 6

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

During my time of service I received the gift of time, the time to contemplate my relationship with God, to contemplate my goals in life, and time to create new traditions. I was given the opportunity to redefine what it means to be a family, and in turn was given the gift of three new brothers and a sister. I was given the gift of a new home and new extended family. I was provided with a new worldview, and a new perspective through which to understand my country. For all of these gifts I received I am incredibly grateful to the Sisters of Bon Secours and to BSVM.

Scenes from Orientation August 2017



Clockwise from top left: A day of learning at Baltimore's Markets; Ruby Miller is challenged to do acts of service while wrapped in bubble wrap-all part of Orientation fun; The 2017 - 2018 BSVM volunteers are all about teamwork during their trip to Genesee Valley; Volunteers at Baltimore's historic Federal Hill; Claire Kimilu shared about her life and family; Volunteers share lots of laughs at Genesee Valley.



BSVM Volunteers Cleaning Up their Community

Left to right: Volunteers Beatriz Cuevas, Claire Kimilu, Elizabeth Tittle, Ruby Miller, Sam Ting and Narda Salinas work together to keep their community in Southwest Baltimore clean.

“Every weekday, we go out in pairs to pick up any trash on our block. This has been a great way to meet our neighbors, as well as contribute to the maintenance of our new neighborhood,” said Beatriz Cuevas.



Continued from Elizabeth Tittle on page 3

The ultimate goal of our trip to Thibodaux was to see God in those we served and served with and to share our love with those around us. It was in Thibodaux that my heart was set on fire by the hospitality from the community and also from the challenges that came with delving deeper into the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of social injustice. It was in Thibodaux that I understood for the first time the importance of Villanova’s motto, “Unitas, Veritas, Caritas”, which roughly translates to unity, truth, and love. As we grew together in unity, searched for truth, and gave and received loved, we developed community with all we encountered.

Katrine embodies and lives out all three of the characteristics of Villanova’s motto. I am constantly in awe of her effervescence for life, her desire to learn about and understand the world around her, her compassion for everyone that she encounters, her curiosity to pursue topics of social justice, and her conviction to make a change in the world. I am impacted and touched by each one of our conversations and interactions. For all of these reasons, Katrine has been a role model for me. I am truly blessed by her insights, friendship, and mentoring these past two years (and many more years to come!).

As a result of the time I spent in Thibodaux and my relationship with Katrine, my heart was set on fire to pursue service learning and to learn more about the pervasiveness of societal injustice. I am eternally grateful to her, Thibodaux, and Villanova for all that they have taught me about social justice and injustice, service learning, and the importance of “Unitas, Veritas, and Caritas.” However, I am now looking forward to the year ahead with BSVM. I’m excited for the challenges, the triumphs, the hardships, and the victories that are sure to come in Baltimore. I’m excited to become part of a new community, a new BSVM family. Lastly, I am excited to be living out each day with my heart set on fire with the passion, care, and determination that comes with a year of service and having my desire for community, truth, and love at the root of everything that I do.



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

Sr. Alice Talone, C.B.S. joins the 2017-2018 volunteers on their first day of orientation.

Photographer: Andres Gomez, Site Leader

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
Director of Community Impact-Basic Needs
United Way of Dane County
Madison, WI

Sr. Elaine Davia, C.B.S.

Director of Formation

Eve DeVaro Fowler

Director, Patient Advocacy
Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital

Katie Mulembe

Coordinator of Recruitment and Alumni
Relations, Catholic Volunteer Network

Amy Nee

Catholic Worker

Patrick Range

Inpatient Social Worker
Medical ICU
University of Maryland Medical Center

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; Regina Fleck, Recruiter; Liesel Rupprecht, Program Coordinator