

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Spring 2018

Issue 25



The Gift of Presence Makes Voices Heard

by Sam Ting, 2017-2018 Volunteer

A Graduate of Loyola Marymount University



Service became an integral part of my life during college. I wanted to do more than discuss social justice issues. I wanted to act. I continued my passion by committing to a year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Being able to experience these injustices first hand through my service in college has granted me the extraordinary opportunity to fully devote myself to an immersive, intense year of service.

Living in radical solidarity with my neighbors in an underprivileged and forgotten neighborhood in Baltimore has opened my eyes to the great disparities that many communities living in poverty within the United States face. Working on the Inpatient Unit of Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital, I have the privilege of speaking with people from the community and absorbing their stories. I witness the peculiar beauty that results from the daily struggle and tremendous obstacles my patients experience. I have learned that by simply offering a smile and a kind ear to listen, a sense of camaraderie and emotional support arises during a time of uncertainty.

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Editor's Corner
Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



As you read the reflections that Narda Salinas and Sam Ting contributed to this issue of *The Companion*, I ask you to keep in mind an emotion that may or may not be detectable within their writing: the element of surprise. Know that both volunteers experienced a sacred sense of surprise as they encountered the learnings they describe.

Surprise is a complex emotion comprised of different facets. We can be taken by surprise in stressful and negative ways, in frantic and exciting ways, and in soft, quiet ways. It is the last description that I ask you to consider today. It is our hope that the volunteers' year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is filled with the wonder and awe that accompanies hearts broken open by God's love.

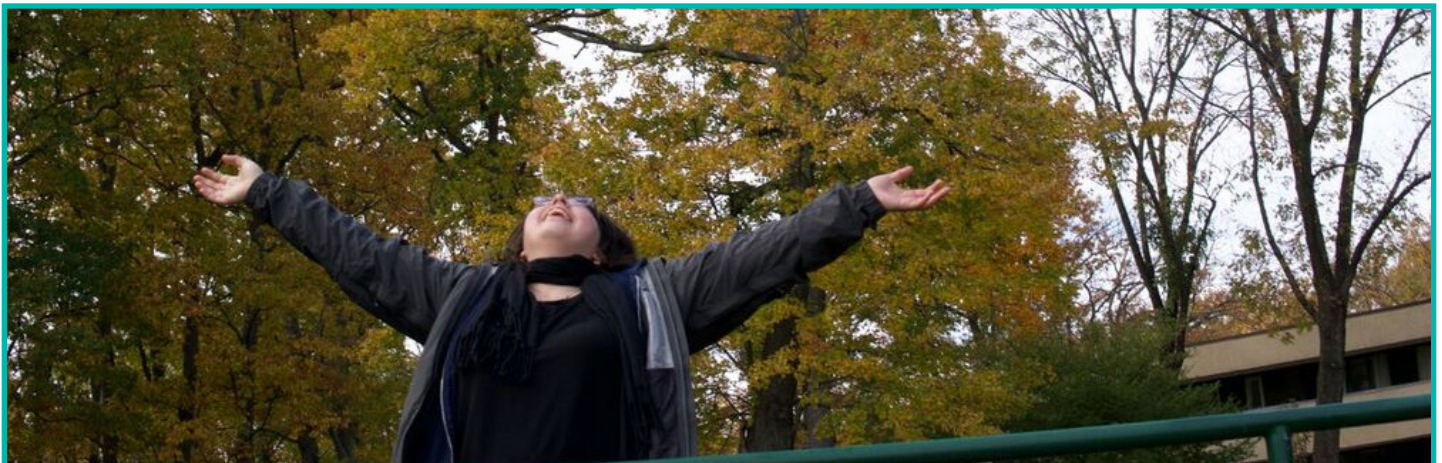
Sam and Narda approached their year of service with curious hearts and deep humility. This approach opened a space for genuine surprise as they encountered people and circumstances that challenged their understanding of service and simplicity. It is by leaning into this unexpected learning that they, that all of us, grow closer to God. Within our response to the mystery of God's love lies the opportunity for the strengthening of our relationships with God and others.

In his poem, *Zero Circle*, the Sufi poet, Rumi, expresses this experience so well,

*Be helpless, dumbfounded,
Unable to say yes or no.
Then a stretcher will come from grace
to gather us up.*

When we allow ourselves to be dumbfounded by the sacredness of life, we allow God to work within us.

May the experiences of Sam and Narda remind you that surprise draws us into unexpected places. Sam was led to deeper relationship with those he met directly through his service. For Narda, unexpected insights called her to reconsider her expression of what it means to live simply. May we pray in gratitude for their sharing as they gently remind us of the awe and wonder that calls to each of our hearts.



Beatriz opens her heart and arms in gratitude.

I have been surprised to learn that these simple actions create an enormous impact on the lives of patients. Providing my neighbors with a kind ear to listen allows them the comfort of feeling that they are cared for and not forgotten or “just another patient.” Our conversations are one way in which both the patients and myself feel more human in a society that dehumanizes the voices of the most vulnerable.

Living in this neighborhood is a tremendous task for anyone to handle, as evidenced by a patient I bonded with in the hospital. At first, Mr. Smith and I did not connect well. However, as I kept checking on him throughout the day, he realized that I was a consistent and committed presence and that I would be there to help with whatever he needed. He slowly opened up to me and shared many hardships that he experienced, from growing up with very few privileges to difficulty accessing appropriate healthcare. He was admitted into the hospital because of health concerns that arose due to untreated conditions. Two days after we first spoke, I walked into Mr. Smith’s room and he just started crying. He continued to share more deeply and explained that since he was getting transferred for a procedure he was nervous. He also told me that he was so grateful for the time he spent with me and that he believed God put him in this circumstance so he would meet me. Feeling how powerful our relationship had become through this simple statement allowed me to see God working in that moment. Experiencing this vulnerable moment with him taught me about the bond and support he felt from our relationship.

A few weeks after Mr. Smith left, he came back to the hospital for a follow up appointment. He also came up to the 3rd floor to talk to me. This small act of going out of his way to find me and update me on his situation showed me that our relationship extended beyond the walls of the hospital into his life. Through the time I spent with Mr. Smith and many moments similar to it, I’ve learned that serving is not about completely changing someone’s life or creating a miraculous moment of realization. It is just about helping a neighbor feel human.

Feeling like you are human is a basic necessity that everyone needs and deserves. Simply listening to Mr. Smith’s experiences allowed me to feel more human. I have come to understand that serving is about simply being present - fully knowing that my dignity is tied to the dignity of all.



Meet Beatriz Cuevas
A Graduate of Stanford University

Who has modeled being “Good Help to Those in Need” in your life? Describe why you are inspired by this person.

A person who inspires me is a former teacher. Mr. M was my middle school history teacher who unfortunately passed away a year ago. Despite his passing, I constantly think about him and his impact. Mr. M graduated from Michigan State University and went on to participate in Teach for America on the U.S. - Mexico border. After that, he moved to the Bay Area to teach at under-resourced schools, like the one I attended. Not only was Mr. M an engaging history teacher, he was also an overall loving person. He cared deeply about each of his students and loved every single one of us without judgment. Outside of the classroom, Mr. M took us on educational fieldtrips to places that many of us would have never visited if it weren’t for him. For these, and many more reasons, Mr. M is an example of being “*Good Help to Those in Need*” in my life. He followed his call to teach in under-resourced schools and impacted the lives of many students, including myself. Always missing you, Mr. M!

Living Simply to Simply Connect

by Narda Salinas, 2017-2018 Volunteer
A Graduate of St. Edward's University

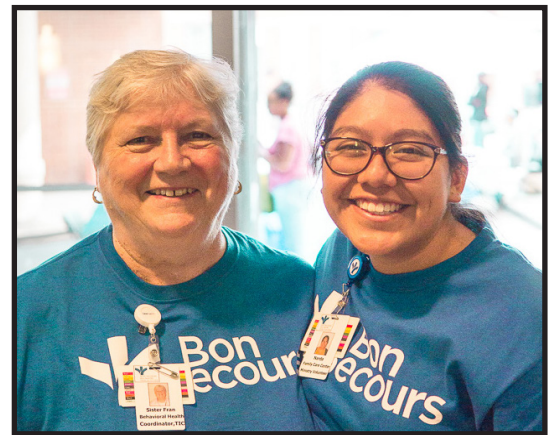


Consider this; you are in a waiting area, the television is on, there are dozens of magazines and educational pamphlets on the tables, and you even have wireless internet to browse through endless sources of social media. While some of these things help pass time, you still cannot help but glance at the clock. The reason for this may be that no amount of distractions can fill you like human interactions. When you strike up a conversation with another person, time seems to fly by. It is a simple act that does not require material things, but does require presence.

I have learned that fewer distractions allow for more time to create human connection. There are times when I walk into the waiting area at the Bon Secours Family Health and Wellness Center and there is absolute silence and a feeling of apathy within the room. Then, there are moments when people are naturally talking and laughing with one another. In these shared exchanges, I feel God. I see God moving through everyone in the room as they talk about their daily lives. I experience the divine within these interactions as those in the waiting room take the time to see others and to be seen.

I serve the patients at this clinic by reminding them of their appointments, connecting them with resources, and supporting them in any way that I am able. I would miss these opportunities of service if I was distracted by material things or my own thoughts. My mind and heart would be cluttered and I would be unable to be completely present to those I meet. When I reflect on these moments of connection, it occurs to me that living simply is truly about relationship.

Being aware of and making efforts to remove distractions helps to cultivate the commitment to live simply. At the same time, I am learning that living simply is not about deprivation. Not understanding this when I first moved to Baltimore, I packed my essential belongings carefully into one suitcase and a duffel bag. I minimized my wardrobe and packed a couple of photographs to feel at home. By circumstance, I lived simply before so I was no stranger to the concept (or so I thought). I visualized living simply as living minimally with only the bare necessities. As I prepared for my year with BSVM, I made a personal vow to use my phone so rarely that my friends and family at home would know not to expect updates from me regularly. I believed that living simply meant going “off the grid,” so that I would be fully present in Baltimore. However, I quickly learned that restricting my communication with friends and family did not mean that my mind would not wander to other places. Now I understand that I do away with “stuff” not to have less, but to make intentional room for my priorities. My phone experiment taught me that I do not have to completely get rid of my phone; what matters is when and why I use it.



Sr. Fran Gorsuch, CBS and Narda

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Meet Ruby Miller A Graduate of Stonehill College

Who has modeled being “Good Help to Those in Need” in your life? Describe why you are inspired by this person.

There are many individuals in my life who imitate Christ by acting as heavenly ministers on earth. One in particular who is a constant inspiration with her selfless, peacemaking presence is Doreen, the volunteer coordinator at my hometown soup kitchen in Rhode Island. At first glance, and at no more than five-feet-tall, Doreen does not seem a likely candidate to maintain order among the hungry clientele. However, the tremendous respect that she is shown by staff and patrons alike bears witness to her gift of helping to lighten the burdens of those around her simply by sharing joys and sorrows. Through Doreen’s dedication to serving in her community, I can see the hands and feet of Jesus working to reach the hungry and forgotten.

What is one item on your “bucket list”? Why is it important to you?

Ever since visiting Ireland for the first time five years ago, I knew that I needed to return. There is so much of the Emerald Isle that I would like to explore, especially because in learning about the country I feel a deep connection to my heritage. My great-grandfather immigrated to the US from County Kerry, and through my Granny and my mother I was inspired to carry on the rich cultural traditions of Irish music and dance. It is through these artistic expressions that I have become enthralled with the magical island and can hardly wait to visit again.

What is your favorite song or book and why does it speak to you?

Anne of Green Gables will forever be my favorite book. I identify with Anne as a “kindred spirit” and share her lively imagination, affinity for adventures, and love of nature. Lucy Maud Montgomery’s story is such a pure depiction of family and of the timeless values that hold true in every generation. It offers new life lessons every time I revisit the familiar pages.

Continued from Narda Salinas page 4

Recently, this truth became clear. My community chose to challenge ourselves to live more simply for a week by only listening to music when other people were present. While we struggled with not having our own music, relationship building opportunities presented themselves. We bonded over sharing each other’s music and filled our silent times with other activities such as reading and knitting. For me, this emphasized the idea that purposeful choices and considerate actions fill my life and the lives of others. I now make time to speak with loved ones, just as I make time for my community members in Baltimore. Both are essential to me.

Before coming to BSVM, my focus on deprivation limited my vision of what it means to live simply. I now understand that living simply means centering myself and being present with others in the moment, whether it be listening to a friend’s favorite song, talking on the phone, or asking for more details about my friend’s latest adventure. Living simply means living fully. It brings me closer to others, to God, to finding God in others, and in so doing to my authentic self.

BSVM Recognizes the Love and Support of its Founders, the Sisters of Bon Secours

Throughout its 19 year history, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has felt the love and support of, its founders, the Sisters of Bon Secours. The volunteers serve in Southwest Baltimore, the same neighborhood where the Sisters began serving the people of Baltimore over 150 years ago. This shared mission helps to create a bond between the young adults that join BSVM and the Sisters. Each year, the Sisters support the volunteers by sharing deeply of themselves. They accompany the volunteers in prayer, commission the volunteers upon their arrival to and departure from the ministry, share the history of the Congregation with the volunteers, enjoy fun bonding times together, and inspire the volunteers by being a living witness of their charism; to share the Holy Spirit's gifts of compassion, healing, and liberation.

Below, 2010-2011 BSVM Alum, Kari Hoeft (Kragness), shares how she was personally affected by the sisters in a deep and personal way.



Kari, fifth from right, pictured with the Sisters and fellow volunteers at their closing ceremony.

Sr. Nancy Glynn, CBS told me, and I will never forget, that “...the ability to form this sense of trust with God comes with your ability to trust others.” Her words serve as a constant reminder that having faith in God stems from having faith in others.

“...the ability to form this sense of trust with God comes with your ability to trust others.”

- Sr. Nancy Glynn, CBS

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What is your favorite song or book and why does it speak to you?

As part of our BSVM formation program, we read pre-selected spiritual and social justice books together as a group. One of the books we read was *Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self* by Fr James Martin S.J. I loved it! I loved it because it helped me reflect on myself and my faith. Some of my favorite quotes from the book were:

“For me to be a saint means to be myself.” - Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O.

“Everyone’s true self is a unique creation of God’s, and the way to sanctity is to become the unique self that God wishes us to be.” - Fr. James Martin, S.J.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

Last year, I attended a leadership conference, and one of the best pieces of advice I received was, “If you don’t ask, you won’t get.” When I heard this quote it immediately stuck with me because it reminds me to advocate for myself and to ask for help or extra resources or support when I need them.

Rebecca and Kyle Obendorf Alumni Profile (BSVM 2012-2013)

Each year, Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers embrace living within an intentional community. With this commitment, they are asked to express their love for each other as brothers and sisters. By practicing love in such a way they form strong, inclusive bonds over the course of the year. It is through community that the BSVM volunteers deepen their understanding of how to share and receive God's love from others, allowing God and others to enrich their lives.

Kyle and Rebecca (McCunniff) Obendorf served with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry during the 2012-2013 service year. After their year of service, the friendship that they developed grew into an intimate partnership and they were married on July 30, 2016. Their experience of community life became a solid foundation for expressing their love as a couple and the lessons they learned by living together as community members continue to inform their relationship to this day. It was a privilege and a blessing for BSVM to witness love fostered in a community setting grow into a deep committed relationship. We pray that God continues to bless Kyle and Rebecca with many years filled with love.



*Rebecca and Kyle
at their wedding.*



Marriage and Intentional Community by Kyle and Rebecca Obendorf

When our community met for the first time on September 5, 2012, we excitedly, and somewhat nervously, engaged in the topical conversations that anyone might have entered into before taking the plunge into living in community. We came from many different backgrounds and areas of the country. Our common thread was the desire to serve, and the courage to take the risk to live with five other strangers in an unfamiliar city. Not long after that fateful day, we explored the city together, shared cooking duties, prayed together, and had impromptu dance parties in the common area (Kyle was, and remains, the best dancer). No conversation about our relationship can begin without first discussing community.

Something that we quickly learned was that despite living in a community of six, there was plenty of opportunity to get to know one another on a more individual basis. If Eugene (or anyone else) had a hankering for ice cream, Rebecca was the go-to-girl to go along. Dani and Kyle made trips downtown to the bank together. Rebecca and Kelsey jammed out to their favorite tunes each morning after everyone else had left for the day. Kyle and Julie shared a mutual love of college basketball and would regularly watch games together. It was within these small, everyday interactions and areas of mutual interest that our community grew.

As individuals and as a couple, we have experienced much growth during these past five years that have followed our time with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. We continue to incorporate the lessons and values we learned during our time with BSVM into our lives. Rebecca and I still enjoy meal planning on Sundays, going to mass, praying together, and having the occasional dance party. When we took our vows on July 30, 2016, we committed to continue living in an intentional community with each other. Living in intentional community is

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Sharing Experiences, Opening Hearts:

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Thanks our Alumni for Their Recruitment Efforts
by Regina Fleck, BSVM Volunteer Recruiter

When students consider their post-grad options, it can be an overwhelming experience. Having the opportunity to learn about full-time service from someone who has completed a year with a faith-based service program makes this choice easier to envision. It even becomes an exciting, rather than daunting, possibility. For this reason, we are so grateful to the many alumni who over the years have represented us at post-grad service fairs, shared stories with prospective volunteers in writing, and spread their joy to others in a multitude of ways. It is through their storytelling of living in community and witnessing to life in Southwest Baltimore that the countercultural and life-giving choice of service with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry begins to take shape for prospective volunteers. Alumni sharing of BSVM contributes to, in the words of Dorothy Day, the “ever widening circle [that] will reach around the world.” They also open the door for others to continue living out the Sisters’ charism of compassion, healing, and liberation. Many, many thanks to each one of our members of the Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Alumni Community!



*Faith Yusko (BSVM 2016 - 2017),
Amanda Scanameo (BSVM 2016 - 2017),
and Regina Fleck, BSVM Volunteer
Recruiter, attend post-grad service fair at
St. Joseph’s University.*



*We are grateful to Celina Santiago
(BSVM 2016 - 2017) for sharing
her experience of service at the Bon
Secours Women’s Resource Center
during a trip to Manhattan College.*



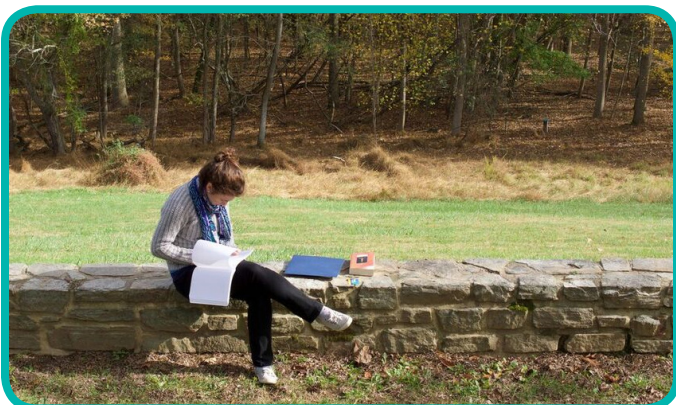
*Amanda Scanameo (BSVM
2016 - 2017) spreading the word
about BSVM to college students
considering service.*

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about living and working with each other with all our imperfections. Despite these imperfections, there is love and a commitment to help our partner grow spiritually and answer God’s call to serve others. We were blessed to have community members attend our wedding, a testament to the bonds that were formed during our year of service. Every day of marriage is an adventure, and our year in Baltimore with Eugene, Dani, Kelsey, and Julie taught us lessons and values that we continue to work on in our first years of marriage and beyond.

PS: After BSVM, Rebecca went on to live with one of our community members, Julie, for a couple more years and was excited to include Julie in her bridal party!

The 2017 - 2018 service year is a time of learning, laughter, and love.



Clockwise from top left:
Narda and Beatriz march with Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS, in Washington, D.C.;
Elizabeth brings a smile and a bouncy ball to children at the Bon Secours Family Support Center;
BSVM celebrates MLK Day at Johns Hopkins Hospital;
Ruby reflects during retreat;
Elizabeth's joy is contagious!



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Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

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Cover Photo

Sam practices the ministry of compassionate presence with a patient.

Photo by Liz O'Neill

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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:

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Regina Fleck, Recruiter; Liesel Rupprecht, Program Coordinator