

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Winter 2019

Issue 27



Quiet Work

By Shannon Curran

Director, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry



Shannon Curran

“See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

Isaiah 43:19

While we can now finally see it, for many years, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has been quietly working at something new. For much of this time the center of my work has been and continues to be listening to how God is moving and working through this ministry. It has been and continues to be quiet work so that our ministry can truly listen to and respond to the Holy Spirit.

Over 20 years ago Sr. Nancy Glynn, CBS heard God’s call for the Sisters of Bon Secours to begin a ministry that supports lay persons to more fully engage with the charism of Bon Secours. Inspired by the community of Capuchin Volunteers next door to her on Fulton Ave, Sr. Nancy perceived that a community of Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers could deeply learn the charism of compassion, healing, and liberation by living into it.

From her own experience, Sr. Nancy knew that inviting young adults to see Christ’s light on Fulton Avenue, to receive God’s love on the corner of Pulaski and West Baltimore Street, and to feel the peace of Christ flow from new relationships is the treasure and, because it is of God, is transformative. With the invitation from Sr. Nancy and under the leadership of Sr. Anne Marie Mack, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry’s mission of “transformation through service with others” commenced in 1999.

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BSVM staff and volunteers at the 2018-2019 Orientation.

I began directing Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry in 2007. When introducing me to the ministry, Sr. Alice Talone, CBS expressed that the sisters had hopes for expanding Volunteer Ministry. In our early years, we had two volunteers in Richmond and, likely unbeknownst to them, one of the fruits of their service was planting the seeds of this hope for expansion.



Srs. Vicki Segura, CBS and Anne Marie Mack, CBS join Richmond Site Leader, Steve DeLaney, and the volunteers in Richmond for dinner.

After a few years of coming to know the ministry and the needs of our volunteers in Baltimore, I started to think carefully about how we might expand the ministry while, at the same time, continuing to fully support the formation of our current volunteers. How could this ministry grow simultaneously both deeper and wider? Growing in both depth and breadth required prayer and it required time.

One way this ministry has deepened is illustrated with a revision to our tagline. In 2007, I wrote that Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers live compassionately, offer healing, and share in liberation. Over time and in relation to developing the structure of this ministry it became clearer that, through striving to live compassionately, our volunteers were not just offering healing— they were receiving healing, too. While it has never been unclear that our volunteers are served by those they serve, our volunteers’ needs for healing and the healing they describe receiving through BSVM has become more clearly voiced.

We hear this in volunteers like Mackenzie Buss, BSVM 15-16, who expressed how her time with BSVM gave her “a new sense of interconnectedness with all humanity and creation which I always believed in intellectually and in theory, but I never felt it as strongly as I do after being here this year and really connecting with people who, on the surface, seem totally different than me.”

We hear it from Abbi Cerezo, BSVM 16-17, who in reflecting on the year writes, “my professors and mentors always told me that there’s always room for improvement and achievement. But what my patients taught me is the opposite—that who I am and what I do or have done is good enough. They have taught me to wholly love myself for who I am. My patients, and much reflection throughout the year, have allowed me to realize that who I am is exactly what God wants me to be....Even with my flaws and imperfections, I know that God loves me for who I am, and my patients were that link that allowed me to see this.”

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Quiet Work

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Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS and Rev. David Stanfill, Pastor of Holy Rosary Catholic Church, parish to our volunteers in Richmond.

Hearing God at work in the relationships built through Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry and the lives of our volunteers has brought me healing, too. As our ministry has deepened, so has our tagline, which now reads: Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers strive to live compassionately, to receive and to offer healing, and to share in liberation.

Along with depth, we have been working at growing in breadth. Much of this work has involved deeply listening to the needs of our volunteers and, in turn, creating and developing the structure of this ministry in response to those needs. The strong support, encouragement, and leadership of Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS and the Sisters of Bon Secours have brought this ministry to the point of expanding our staff so that we are able to fully support the formation of our volunteers.

Several years ago Sr. Anne Marie Mack, CBS asked Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry to perceive how we were being called to something new. Like Sr. Nancy, Sr. Anne Marie knew that the treasure of Christ's light and God's love in the East End of Richmond is transformative and should be shared. She invited us to Church Hill, and she patiently waited as I discerned and prayerfully grew the ministry to support a community of volunteers in two locations.

In the summer of 2016, we began working closely with mission leaders in Richmond to prepare for our volunteers. Dave Belde, Albert Walker, Becky Clay Christensen, and Teresa Crist creatively and collaboratively led the way in creating a home for our volunteers. By partnering with Marion Cake from Project: Homes, a neighborhood partner that constructs high quality affordable housing, the mission leaders ensured that, like our home on Mount Street in Baltimore, the new home of our volunteers in Richmond is also an expression of the mission and charism of Bon Secours.



Left to Right: During the Opening Liturgy, Dave Belde, Becky Clay Christensen, Albert Walker, and Sr. Anne Marie Mack, CBS receive a blessing of gratitude from Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS.

Similarly, members of the Community Health Services Team at Richmond Community Hospital worked closely with our staff to create ministry placement sites for our volunteers. We are grateful for the time, attention, and care they contributed to helping create meaningful ministries for our volunteers in Richmond. In addition to meetings, many travelled to Baltimore to visit with our staff, current volunteers, and Site Supervisors so that they could offer both a warm and an informed welcome to our volunteers.

This is a ministry rooted in relationships and community. Through these roots, new relationships and community grow and bloom. We are grateful for the many, many people who support Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. In particular, we are deeply grateful for all of those who have helped lay the foundation to support our volunteers in Richmond.

We are approaching our 20th Anniversary. Having now ministered to over 80 BSVM Volunteers, we continue our quiet work. With our volunteers living and serving in both West Baltimore and East Richmond, we gratefully celebrate how, to echo Isaiah, what is new now springs forth.

Editor's Corner
Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



Each year, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is blessed with the new life that the volunteers bring to our ministry. In the 2018-2019 service year, we are doubly blessed with our expansion to Richmond, VA.

This issue of *The Companion* celebrates the many ways that God has moved through the hearts of those within and surrounding BSVM to bring us life in different forms. As we joyfully live into this grace-filled growth, we urge you to join us in the celebration.

I ask you to hold these thoughts in your heart and mind as you read the volunteers' reflections. They speak of ways in which they are each growing into the values of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry and the ways in which God is calling them into new life through the relationships being formed in their service sites and communities. I invite you to pray in gratitude with us for the growth of our ministry and for the love and life that God has breathed into us and all those touched by BSVM.

From the Director
Shannon Curran

I am pleased to announce that Emily Thrush joined the staff of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry in October. In her role as BSVM Site Leader, Baltimore, Emily accompanies and guides our volunteers in Baltimore as they learn and grow through service with others. Along with her graduate work in Ethics, Peace, and Global Affairs with a concentration in Social Justice in Urban Society, Emily brings to this work her experience as a full-time volunteer with Discipleship Year, a fellow ministry within the Catholic Volunteer Network. Following her year as a volunteer, Emily lived in an intentional Christian community for several years in DC while working at non-profits. Both Emily's experience living in community and her work with those on the margins in DC inform how she guides our volunteers to uncover the gifts of a life in service and in community. Please join me in warmly and joyfully welcoming Emily to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry.



Meet Emily Thrush
Site Leader, Baltimore



My name is Emily Thrush, and I am very happy to have started as the new Baltimore Site Leader in October. I now live in Baltimore after having lived in Washington, DC for more than a decade. I have grown accustomed to the life of a geographic transplant, as I was born in Pennsylvania, grew up in southern California, went to college in Pennsylvania, and moved to DC after graduating. I served as a volunteer in a similar program to BSVM in DC eleven years ago, and the experience was formative for my spiritual and personal growth. I have worked in non-profits that have included direct service, legal consultation, and policy advocacy, with a particular emphasis on supporting people living in poverty. I am thrilled to be a part of BSVM and to invest in the lives of young adults who have committed to a year of service. Thank you for the warm welcome!



Chris Dethlefs

Compassion: A Two-Way Street By Chris Dethlefs, 2018-2019 Volunteer A Graduate of the University of Notre Dame

My eyelids were heavy at the bedside. I’m not sure how long I’d been there, perhaps an hour. Mr. J was still talking, recounting stories of his days working at a marina near Virginia Beach before his stroke – one that left his vision, movement, and speech partly impaired. I cursed silently. My second day at work, and I could barely stay alert and attentive to this man who had lived in a hospital room for the last five months. I had repeatedly described to friends and family that my role at Richmond Community Hospital (RCH) would involve, “simply offering a compassionate presence to patients.” And here I was, fighting to stay awake as this man offered his experiences to me.

When I first toured the inpatient unit at RCH, I was surprised at how small the floor was. There were about 20 rooms, many of them vacant. Upon discovering that the long-term care “population” with whom I’d be working consisted of less than 10 patients, real doubts started to emerge. Was I going to round on these few people 40 hours a week for the whole year? My first days on the job did little to alleviate my concerns. The pace of the hospital was slow, and concrete tasks were infrequent. I didn’t know what else to do besides pace around the small rectangular unit over and over, looking for any patient that might be open to conversation. And yet this state of relative inactivity was surprisingly draining. I was frustrated at how exhausted I became from simply sitting and listening to people. How was I going to do this all year?

I kept at it. Things slowly became easier. I grew closer with the nurses and the patients on the floor. I found opportunities for involvement in other parts of the hospital and took on some concrete event planning for the inpatient unit. I began plans for developing a communal space and activity curriculum for long-term patients. My place in the facility began to take shape.

But patient rounding has remained the cornerstone of my days. And in this I am beginning to experience real transformation. One of my fears coming into this ministry, and in my plans for a career in medicine, is that I doubt my capacity for real empathy and interpersonal connection. I am not a very animated person. I don’t easily become sentimental or emotionally attached, and I don’t see myself as being a joyful presence to people. But the last few months have shown me that despite these misgivings, intentional action and presence have the power to create space for close relationship. I’m learning to accept my effort towards presence apart from my internal satisfaction, and I feel consolation in witnessing visible impact.



The volunteers host a carnival at Chris’ Ministry Placement Site, the Inpatient Floors of Richmond Community Hospital.

And these efforts have born fruit. In committing to being available to these patients, space for mutual vulnerability has arisen, and from this vulnerability has emerged the beginnings of authentic, supportive friendship. I think of Mr. J, someone who I initially had trouble spending time with. Due to complications he experienced in transferring to RCH, and his slowed recovery afterwards, Mr. J was often pessimistic and cynical. Despite the incomprehensible experience he had endured, I guiltily found myself growing impatient with his despondency. But I kept coming back. I tried to hear him. Eventually I was given the opportunity to take him outside in a wheelchair – the first time he had left the building in months. Even though the air was muggy that day, I sensed the experience brought him some renewal, and he thanked me.

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Sisters' Corner

On August 25, 2018, the entire BSVM community gathered in Marriottsville, MD for orientation. BSVM is deeply grateful to the sisters for making the space and time to begin building a relationship with the volunteers during their first days with our ministry. Below are some messages from volunteers. These expressions of gratitude illustrate the impact the sisters have on each of our volunteers.

The volunteers were particularly touched by the sisters' presence at the Commissioning Mass.



The sisters bless each one of the volunteers during the Commissioning Mass.

...the sisters illustrated a pervasive spirit of fullness and joy for life that ignited a flame for each of the volunteers. I appreciated when Sr. Rosie took the time to not only share the story of Bon Secours but also to continue the conversation with me, personally, after we met as a group.

~ Jocelyn O'Kane

I was deeply moved by the presence and generosity of the sisters at our 'send off' mass. I recall so clearly those moments of contact when the sisters, deliberately and one by one, blessed our hands. I felt profoundly the care and good will of each sister as she looked into my eyes and offered personal blessing on me and the year ahead for our community.

~Chris Dethlefs

The volunteers interacted with sisters in other ways as well. Sr. Alice Talone and Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski met with them to share about the Congregation of the sisters of Bon Secours. The volunteers also chatted informally with the sisters at a Meet and Greet and during dinner after the Commissioning Mass.

My time with the sisters during orientation was so special, and their hospitality and generosity brought peace to my spirit as I transitioned into an unfamiliar experience. It was one of God's first reminders to me that I was entering into an environment where I would be supported by a community that is deeply rooted in Christ.

~ Rebecca Judge

I could not be more grateful for the sisters' powerful welcome, as it has set the stage for my year with the ministry. The sisters, in their diverse passions, their kindheartedness, and above all their love for God and their ministry, have provided me with not only the perfect welcome, but with the perfect role models leading into my year of service.

~Christian Wood



Commissioning Mass 2018

As the year continues, we are grateful for the attention and kindness that the sisters show our volunteers and for the support they give to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. It is through personal connections, like the ones mentioned above, that the charism of Bon Secours moves into the hearts of the volunteers and is then shared with the world in unique and generative ways.



Paula Hastings

Forming the Neural Network of Service

By Paula Hastings, 2018-2019 Volunteer
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

In the brain, every decision you make, every time you think a thought, you are reinforcing a certain neural pathway and making it stronger. When you decide to eat a salad instead of a hamburger, the decision becomes easier and easier every time you make it. Within the salad-eating pathway more receptors are created on the neurons. More neurotransmitters are released. The pathway gets stronger and faster so that each time you do it, it gets a little bit easier and more routine to choose that salad over the burger. It becomes a habit.

This is why when we are trying to learn something, we practice it. When we learn how to read as kids, we first have to sound out every word, but with practice it gets easier and easier. You now read things without even consciously thinking about it sometimes. The synapses work smoothly and effortlessly because you worked at it over years to make it so. You don't have to place as much intentionality into each and every movement. You have learned to read and those neural pathways are well formed.

Learning through service is a different type of learning. When learning through service, there is no past tense. There is no moment when I say to myself, "Okay, I've got this. I've learned everything there is to know about service." It is a present tense verb because I am constantly learning. Every interaction I have with someone reshapes my synopsis. I always have a choice: I can allow my experiences during service to open me to human experiences, or I can turn away from interactions, feeding pathways of fear and insecurity instead.



Paula laughs with her Site Supervisor, Rebecca Blank.



During one of my first few weeks of work in the Outpatient Behavioral Health Clinic, I was sitting in the waiting room with a woman who had been there all day. She didn't have anywhere else to be that day so she decided to hang out in a place where she felt safe. She was very quiet and we just sat and colored together for a while. I would try to make conversation and she would answer with one word and then go silent again. Part of me felt awkward, and I didn't know what to do. Another part of me sensed I needed to be comfortable with the silence. I listened to the latter part of myself and embraced the silence as we both colored and were just present with each other. Eventually, after becoming comfortable with the silence, she started opening up to me and we ended up having a really wonderful conversation. I see her at least once a week now and while she is still very quiet, she always gives me a big smile and shares God's presence with me.

God was in the silence, and it was Christ guiding me to be present rather than trying to talk and force someone to be uncomfortable. It took an active change in my neural pathway to make that decision.

Over and over again, this is shown to me. This experience could have enforced insecurity about my abilities to help others, or opened a space from which I could learn. In the end, it taught me how to better read someone's needs and to work to fulfill them. Other moments have taught me how to admit when I don't know something or just listen and say, "that really sucks" when someone just needs to be heard. Every day, every encounter with someone new is a new chance to see God and let that interaction change me.

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Alumni Profile: Meghan Krueger (BSVM 2014-2015)



In this issue, we highlight **Meghan Krueger (BSVM 2014-2015)**. Meghan has been an extremely active and supportive alum, participating in multiple alumni retreats and in the newly formed BSVM Alumni Chapter in Boston. She continues to give generously of her time and talent to BSVM. Below she shares about her current form of service, her work as a nurse, and how her time with BSVM was formational to her career.

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

I see the influence of my BSVM experience in so much of what I have done since leaving Baltimore. I starting nursing school right after BSVM and know that my time in Baltimore directly impacted the mindset with which I approached all of my classes, patient interactions, and eventual employment choices. In school, I noticed that I had an enthusiasm for the courses in the areas of public and community health and an appreciation for preventative medicine

and care of underserved populations. My excitement seemed to be unmatched by my classmates. I knew this was something worth paying attention to. I also appreciated that these unique interests were directly attributed to my experiences with BSVM. When I learned about community health models and strategies in class, my first thought was, “This is exactly what Joe Ann (Meghan’s Site Supervisor) was doing with the Tele-Heart Program,” and “the way that Bon Secours Hospital functions in the West Baltimore community is a perfect example of this concept.” I had the unique experience of having already seen, and been a part of, what I was learning about in the textbooks. My experiences with BSVM allowed me to more fully embrace these courses and to recognize a great need in the area of community health that I just couldn’t ignore. With this conviction, I have directed my nursing career thus far into the field of homeless healthcare, and to an organization - Boston Healthcare for the Homeless - whose mission parallels the values instilled in me during my time with BSVM.



BSVM Alums in the Boston area picnic together. Left to Right: Elizabeth Tittle ('17-'18), Gerard Ondrey ('15-'16), Matthew Parra ('13-'14), and Meghan Krueger ('14-'15)

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

Processing the BSVM experience continues long after departure from Baltimore. For me, the key to keeping that practice active has been staying connected to the BSVM community. Through phone calls and reunions, I continue to fuel the relationships with my immediate community members. Particularly, during the first year after BSVM, conversations left me incredibly fulfilled, newly energized, and automatically re-connected to what I can only describe as my “BSVM self.”

Something that I didn’t fully appreciate until leaving Baltimore is that volunteers can always remain part of the BSVM community. Participating in Alumni Retreats has allowed me to re-ground myself in BSVM values. These retreats have provided a wonderful opportunity to step back from whatever has become the new “routine” and reflect on challenges and goals, share ideas and fellowship with former volunteers from various communities, and prepare to return to life outside the structure of BSVM with renewed perspective and enthusiasm.

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Compassion: A Two-Way Street

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I started accompanying him during his physical therapy sessions. These sometimes just involved standing without leaning on his walker or holding different postures while sitting in his bed. I grew to appreciate his sarcastic but good-natured humor as he berated his therapist who he claimed was “intent on killing him.” Additional excursions outside became a cherished routine. I recall one particular outing on a gorgeous fall afternoon. He talked more about his stroke and the dreamlike coma he lived in for a month afterwards. He often shared about the struggles he has endured in recovery, and the limitations he continues to battle. Then he said, “I get real lonely.” After a pause, he added, “But I’ve felt different since you came here.”

It is hard to really love a stranger.

The challenge and blessing of my first few months of service has been the invitation of committing to people. Both in community life and in the hospital, I am daily offered the choice to knock on a person’s door, or to pass them by. I frequently fail to choose self-offering. There are patients who I’m still hesitant to engage, and I often channel my energy towards the more amicable. There are days when I feel I have nothing to give, when I do not feel loving or kind or hopeful. But my call is to keep showing up. Solidarity and real compassion are more about consistent choice and action than they are about sentimentality. Empathy takes practice. Relationships take time and work. Trust is not established in an instant. It is hard to really love a stranger.

As I open myself to the experiences of these patients, the meaning of serving *with* others is slowly clarifying. My service is about opening space for the possibility of supportive relationship. I am trying to affirm and share in the life they have to give, while hopefully sharing some of my own. I am learning about their wholeness, and they are teaching me about mine. I am discovering that compassion is a two-way street, one that requires intentional action, commitment, and consistency. I pray for patience and humility as I embark on this path and seek to accompany these patients not just as a servant but as a friend. I just need to keep knocking.

Forming the Neural Network of Service

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It is a myth that our brains are ever “fully developed” at a certain age. Our brains are constantly reshaped and developing throughout our lives. We are always able to reshape our neural networks and learn more about the human experience. Through this year of service, I feel like I am working to make myself Play-Doh – ready to be shaped by every experience and letting it truly happen rather than being resistant to that change. It is a practice that is aided by accepting that God is in charge of molding my Play-Doh brain. God places me in new environments and with different people, actively working to reshape my neural networks. Through service, I am strengthening my neural pathway for acceptance of new experiences and working to weaken those pathways of insecurity in the face of unknowing.

These kinds of changes are ones that I will be working on throughout my life.

Paula and Chris spread the word about BSVM at the University of Notre Dame.



Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Expands to Richmond, Virginia



Maggie Rybak and Albert Walker, Maggie's Site Supervisor, give a thumbs up.



Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS visits the volunteer house.



Love and laughter is in the air as the volunteers process out of the Richmond Opening Liturgy.



Fiona loves serving with Care-A-Van, a mobile health clinic.

In Gratitude for Our Growth!



There was much to be thankful for when the volunteers celebrated Thanksgiving together in Richmond.



Rebecca and Maggie spread the word about Medicaid/Medicare expansion in Virginia.



Baltimore volunteers prepare for Christmas.

Alumni Profile

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Last year, I had the great blessing of living again as roommates with one of my community members. While we obviously were unable to exactly recreate our Baltimore community, sharing the same living space once again allowed us to be more intentional about the way we lived and to keep each other accountable to some of our BSVM-rooted ideals. We even had the unique opportunity to lead a pilot effort to start a BSVM Alumni Chapter for former volunteers living in the Boston area. So far, we have been able to engage in fellowship with this group through sharing meals, reflecting on readings, and taking on simple living challenges during Lent. Our goal is to continue to build this community through regular gathering. Personally, anything that keeps me connected to BSVM always provides me with a chance to reflect, it renews my spirit, and brings me great joy.

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

I feel as though some of the gifts that I have received during my time of service naturally reveal themselves through my reflections in the previous questions. First of all, my BSVM experiences have directly shaped the perspective I bring to my professional career, which informs the work I do every day. Secondly, I have been given the gift of a wonderful community, and more broadly, a greater appreciation for community. Living in an intentional community was such a special experience. In being challenged and encouraged to reach out to others and process experiences together, I recognized how important this practice is to sustaining hope and compassion in any effort for social justice. As a result, I now find myself far more open to and proactive about doing the same in my daily life.



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Cover Photo

Left to Right:

Richmond volunteers and Sisters of Bon Secours celebrate together during the Opening Liturgy at Holy Rosary Parish in Church Hill.

Photographer: 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 Richmond, 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; Emily Thrush, Site Leader, Baltimore; Steve DeLaney, Site Leader, Richmond; Regina Fleck, Recruiter; Liesel Rupprecht, Program Coordinator