

# THE COMPANION

*The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry*

Spring 2020

Issue 31



## How Can We Afford Not to Live Simply?

By Abigail McDonough, 2019-2020 Volunteer  
A graduate of Kalamazoo College



Abigail McDonough

It's 7pm on a Friday night and my community member Delaney and I are making our way through the shopping list, picking up the groceries that we need for the week. As we push the silver cart around the aisles, we fill it with the options that have the lowest unit price trying to keep the total cost for our community for the week as low as possible. This image of budgeting and searching for deals might be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about simple living on a small stipend. Having to evaluate my needs and wants is different than how I operated in college. Under simple living, I have been shifting the awareness of my purchasing from just figuring out my tastes and preferences to thinking about each item as a necessity versus luxury. I find that I take more time thinking about each item that I choose to purchase, asking myself why I want to buy it, and what it means to me. But this only scratches the surface of what it really means to embody simple living.

Simple living is not just about making the way we purchase food more intentional, it's about turning our extremely scheduled, busy lives of *doing* upside down, and about creating a more life-giving way of living in our daily lives. It is about rethinking and unlearning patterns of living that function to prevent us from connecting fully to the world around us, to the people next to us and to our inner selves. We must clear the clutter away from our minds and our hearts in order to begin to see the common thread of love that connects us all together.

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## Editor's Corner

Olivia Steback

BSVM Program Manager



One of the ways we guide our volunteers in learning, growing, and staying rooted during their year of service with BSVM (and beyond) is by providing space to reflect on their experiences and develop their prayer lives. As they interface their service experiences with prayer, scripture, and reflection, they internalize wisdom that helps to frame the rest of their lives. They learn to listen to and trust the insights that arise in their hearts.

In this issue of *The Companion*, we share reflections that echo this interplay of reflection and growth. Abby and Josh have the courage to search for meaning in their daily interactions and to glean lessons that will be the building blocks for the formation of their deepest beliefs. In his piece about the pillar – Practice God's Justice, Joshua Gillen emphasizes the oneness of humanity by ending his reflection on his experience of service in the ER of Richmond Community Hospital with the words,

*"...it did not matter whether we were different or "other," from the "right" or "wrong" side of town, but that we were able to accompany one another on the path towards our one human family."*

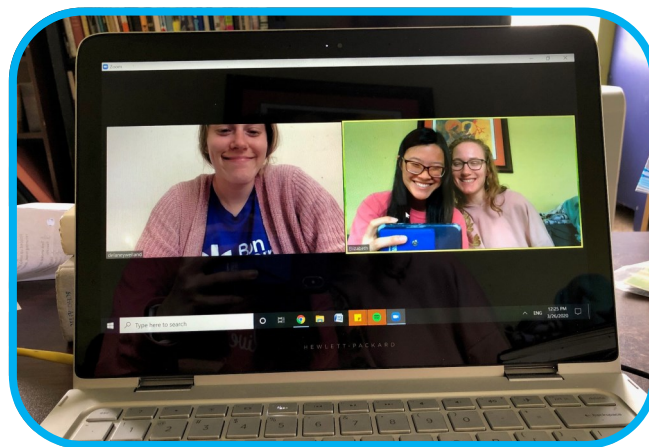
I found these words to be a source of comfort in this time of physical separation as I write this in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. It is worth noting that we, as a society, tend to forget our oneness and are only drawn to that reality when we face large collective events, particularly of struggle and challenge. Yet, Josh wrote these words just prior to the beginning of COVID-19. During his daily service this year he sensed the truth of oneness.

Writing about living simply, BSVM volunteer Abby McDonough also touches on this theme. She describes how her experiences with BSVM have helped her to come to a better understanding of how decluttering our lives internally allows us to be more available for relationship. As we move into deeper relationships we become more aware of our connectedness, of the oneness that holds us all.

This awareness of oneness touches the volunteers' lives in ways they may not expect. 2013-2014 BSVM alum, Nicole Campion, shares how her experience with community motivated her to continue to work for God's justice. After completing her year of service, she remained in Baltimore as she studied medicine and public health at the University of Maryland. As a community member and student, she advocated for her neighbors in West Baltimore and worked to end gun violence. It is a natural desire to serve those close to us, those for whom we care and love. When our sense of responsibility for another extends beyond family and friends to include all creation and people, our desire for justice moves outwards as well.

As our global community walks through fear and struggle, our oneness has become a source of strength and hope. It also calls us to care for our neighbors. It is inspiring to see strangers reaching out to each other and looking for ways to support the sick, healthcare workers, small business owners, and others adversely affected by COVID-19.

Creation joins with us; Mother Nature brings us signs of hope through blossoms that spring forth and warm sunny days that heal our souls. May we always remember – long after the worst of this crisis is behind us – that we are one in God's embrace, whether we be experiencing hardship or joy, prosperity or scarcity, laughter or sorrow, because it is through oneness that hope rises.



**Current ministry volunteers; Delaney, Elizabeth, and Abby stay connected while spending time apart during the COVID-19 crisis.**



**Joshua Gillen**

# The “Wrong” Side of Town

By Joshua Gillen, 2019-2020 Volunteer  
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

“Yo, you guys are on the wrong side of the Hill!”

It was our first night in Richmond and we were walking back from a convenience store with our snacks when two young men on motorized scooters zipped up to us, intrigued by our presence and interested in what we were up to. The other BSVM volunteers and I told them we lived nearby and were new to the neighborhood, at which point we were summarily informed that we did not belong on this side of town. In a historically poor and African American area of Richmond, we probably did stand out as a group of people from different backgrounds, most of which are white. The

Church Hill neighborhood that we moved to was very different than the one with which most people would associate us.

Richmond, generally, and Church Hill specifically, has always been split by race, a vestige of its past as a major center for the slave trade and capital of the Confederacy. One side of Church Hill, the one punctuated by St. John’s Church where Patrick Henry gave his famous, “give me liberty or give me death” speech, has come to be associated with the wealthy, white owners of Richmond’s industries. Even today, it is heavily gentrified. The other side of Church Hill, peppered with public housing and heavy police presence, has come to be associated with the poor, black workers employed by Richmond’s elite and forgotten once they were no longer needed. On one side of Church Hill, liberty; on the other, death.

Growing up in an upper-middle class suburb in Rhode Island, my background is easily associated with the former depiction of Church Hill. I cannot blame those two young men for mistaking my presence in “the wrong side” of town. However, the intentionality behind living where we serve as part of BSVM has allowed me to question what side of town is the “right” one and the “wrong” one. The purpose of this year of service has been to go to the margins of society and be accompanied by those who are often overlooked by a

capitalistic system that does not value or acknowledge the voices of the poor. The work that BSVM volunteers strive towards does not end when we step out of the hospital, but continues with how we care for our community and interact with our neighbors.



**Josh cares for a patient in the Richmond Community Hospital Emergency Department.**

Our neighborhood and our work at Richmond Community Hospital straddles the two realities of Church Hill. Walk a couple blocks in one direction and you will begin to see the effects of the recent gentrification of the past decade; a couple blocks in the other direction reveals the poverty that their neighbors are faced with every day. The staff I work with are largely from towns just outside of Richmond, and I have fielded several questions about whether or not I feel safe living in the neighborhood (I do!). Yet the majority of our patients are from the area around the hospital: many come into the emergency department where I work

because they lack primary care, and some are facing homelessness or mental health problems stemming from the trauma of growing up with the uncertainty and insecurity of poverty. As a patient liaison in the emergency department, one of my responsibilities is to serve as that connection point between staff and patients.

The emergency department sees every person who walks through our doors seeking help and care, regardless of their background or financial situation. This call to care compassionately for all who need it has allowed me to start erasing the margins, as Fr. Greg Boyle so poignantly says, that form the “right” and “wrong” sides of Church Hill, and to see our patients in the light of our one human family rather than as strangers who may be different than me.

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## Sisters' Corner

We Remember Sr. Mary Rita Nangle, CBS  
By Paula Hastings, BSVM 2018 – 2019 and  
BSVM Recruiter

Sr. Mary Rita Nangle (1936- 2019) is remembered fondly by many ministry volunteers over the years. She spent decades serving in Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital and the greater West Baltimore community, and she was a powerful role model to volunteers in the ministry of presence. Jocelyn O'Kane, BSVM 2018-2019, reminisces about her interactions with Sr. Mary Rita in the hospital, "Every morning, after asking her how she was doing that day, she would say the same thing: 'blessed'. Sr. Mary Rita truly lived a blessed life and was a light and blessing to everybody else in her community and the hospital." Sr. Mary Rita inspired ministry volunteers through her laughter, her joy of coloring, and her comforting presence to hospital staff and patients alike. She is missed by many.



Sr. Mary Rita and Amanda Scanameo, BSVM 2016-2017, enjoy the Crab Fest together.



2018-2019 BSVM community with Sr. Mary Rita after chatting about her 50 years as a Sister of Bon Secours.



Sr. Mary Rita and Mackenzie Buss, BSVM 2015-2016, share coffee and laughter.

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### **The 'Wrong Side' of Town**

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It has allowed me to enter a space of mutuality with each patient I encounter so that I may be able to witness and accompany them on their journey just as they witness and accompany me on my journey. I aim to create that space for patients to share part of ourselves with one another for a while. It is this sense of recognizing the common humanity we share as we walk together on life's journey that I associate with God's justice.

One of the patients I had the privilege of encountering was a woman with dementia who was being treated in the emergency department. She did not understand why she was there despite staff explanations, and she grew hostile with one of the nurses who was preventing her from wandering out of the hospital. At first when I walked into her room to keep an eye on her, she accused me of being a spy for the "other side." But as I started talking with her, she began to soften and engage with me. For 45 minutes, we talked about our families and her life growing up. In that time, she calmed down and began to trust me and the other staff members who were trying to help her. After she left, I found myself with a joyful smile, recognizing the special moment that took place, in which we were able to authentically be ourselves and walk with one another on our respective journeys. We were able to share in this small space of mutuality as two connected people, no longer strangers.

This is the type of connection or kinship that God calls us to in order to love one another as we are loved. There were no sides or "others" in our exchange, just the two of us being with one another. In that moment, it did not matter whether we were different or "other," from the "right" or "wrong" side of town, but that we were able to accompany one another on the path back towards our one human family.

## Alumni Profile

### Nicole Campion, BSVM 2013 - 2014

*BSVM is blessed to have Nicole Campion as a member of our community. After her year of service, she went on to attend the University of Maryland and currently lives in Southwest Baltimore. She remains a strong and faithful presence in BSVM.*

This spring, I will be wrapping up five years of studying medicine and public health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM), right here in West Baltimore. Before coming to BSVM, I was considering pursuing medicine as a career but was still unsure. My



**BSVM alums Nicole Campion and Patrick O'Neil enjoy time with the 2016-2017 BSVM Community.**

experiences with BSVM—both inside and outside of the hospital—helped me confirm that I wanted to study medicine and public health together, to blend community and clinical care in my career.

After my year of service, I applied to a wide variety of programs; God must have wanted me back in Baltimore because the dual-degree program at UMSOM was the only place I was accepted! I was happy to return to Baltimore and very intentionally chose to live in the Hollins Market neighborhood (just a few blocks away from the BSVM volunteer house) when I started school, because I wanted to continue to be immersed in the community where my patients live, work, and play. My husband, Papa Moussa, and I have been living in the same little row house these past five years.



**Nicole with husband, Papa Moussa.**

#### ***How has your view of the city (particularly in relationship to justice and community) developed and changed since you have been a volunteer?***

Over the last 5 years, I have come to see the city through the lens of a graduate student and soon-to-be professional. On a professional level, I've learned more about the roles for government and business in advancing social justice communities. As a volunteer, I focused on building community and justice through my one-on-one interactions with individual people, and now I often think about I can extend this commitment to my future work as a leader in medicine and public health. On a more personal level, I have enjoyed sharing Baltimore with family and friends who come to visit. Moussa and I love welcoming others to our home for food and conversation, and showing off the beautiful parts of our city.

#### ***How do you continue to be involved in BSVM's mission while living in the city?***

I've had the great pleasure of meeting many of the volunteers and helping to welcome them to the neighborhood during the BSVM Orientation! Several times, I've led yoga or other exercise sessions for the new volunteers and discussed with them ideas for self-care and ways to enjoy Baltimore. I've also stayed involved with an organization that I first learned about during my year of service, Back on My Feet. It's a fantastic organization that helps people overcome homelessness through the sport of running. Volunteering with Back on My Feet allows me to continue the ministry of presence, simply being there and sharing experiences of growth with people who are going through a difficult time in their lives. Most importantly, I try to be present to people I meet as I go about my day, from the street corner to the hospital room. I want to continue to see each person as my neighbor, worthy of dignity, attention, and respect.

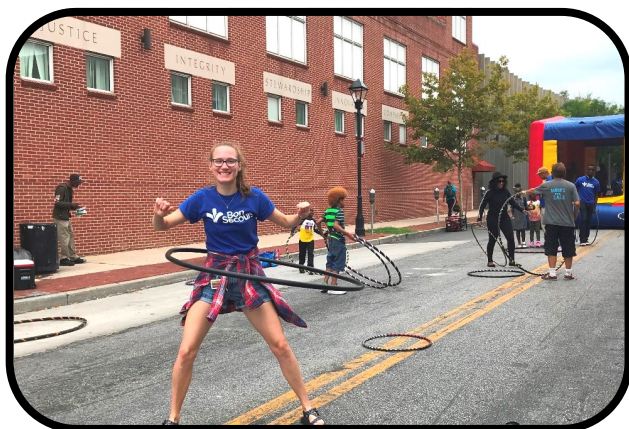
In my role as a student, my BSVM experience has helped me raise my voice to advocate for my neighborhood through my academic and volunteer activities. I had the chance to volunteer with my school's Community Engagement Center where I met a number of neighbors that I've kept in touch with over the years. A few years later, I worked with an interdisciplinary team of students to study the issue of gun violence in West Baltimore, and then wrote a white paper outlining recommendations for University leadership about how our school could be more involved in working on this issue. I also helped advocate for safer sidewalks next to a university construction site in our neighborhood.

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**How Can We Afford Not to Live Simply?**

*Continued from Cover*

Armand DiMele (psychotherapist and radio broadcaster) tells us, “When people go within and connect with themselves, they realize that they are connected to the universe and they are connected to all living things.” This, I believe is everything that we stand to gain from embracing simple living.



**Abby enjoys time with her neighbors during Bon Secours Community Health Day.**

How can we do this? How does this request for simple living permeate every aspect of our lives? We must first start with how we occupy our time and what we value. Is value placed in cultivation of relationships, in the need to seek quiet and stillness, in reflection and finding meaning in the everyday events that unfold around us? Or is an emphasis placed on productivity, measuring success by wealth and popularity, finding our validation in the external loci of money, people and power? Once we draw awareness to where we are placing value, we can then work to actively embrace a more flexible and open mind and heart, one that extends more love and understanding to everyone and everything that we encounter.

capture every passing event on multiple social media outlets in real time for the whole world to see, and have the ability to create for ourselves our own isolated bubble by placing headphones in our ears to tune out the soundscape and people around us. Simple living asks us to grapple with questions about connectedness and the ways that we fill our minds and hearts with diversions that keep us busy in order to avoid having to think about the hard messy things that might bring up complicated emotions. In the words of Janet Luhrs in *The Simple Living Guide* (a book we read during our BSVM formation time), “we make our lives complex, so we don’t have to experience what is really going on.” It can seem easier to occupy any space that could be devoted for feeling with something else, but this can stunt our ability to grow as a person if we do not take the time for the reflection and discernment that we need.

For many people, our free time (if we are lucky enough to have some) is typically spent watching Netflix, sports on TV, or scrolling on social media, sometimes with two or three of these things happening at the same time. We

As Delaney and I push our full shopping cart in line to check out I am reminded that although the concept of simple living started with the small idea of limiting our grocery bill, it really is a value about connection; connection to the land that produced our food, to those who grew and picked our food, to those who prepare or serve our food, and to those with whom we choose to share a meal. When it all comes down to it, how can we afford not to declutter our internal lives and live simply?

**Alumni Profile**

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**What signs of hope do you see in Baltimore?**



**Beautiful sunset in Southwest Baltimore.  
Photo by Nicole Campion.**

People are excited about Baltimore! There are so many interesting local businesses popping up all over the city, from restaurants, to book shops, to co-working spaces. I’ve met many people who see Baltimore as a great place especially for young people to come and invest their time, effort, and energy, to build something new. I’ve also met students and faculty from various universities around the city who are passionate about celebrating Baltimore’s diversity and using this strength to advance justice in our communities, making the city a safer, more peaceful place that is full of opportunity for all.

## Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Spreads Love



Liv and Mark share their musical talent at Richmond Community Hospital.



Sr. Fran Gorsuch, CBS celebrates Valentine's Day with Delaney and Elizabeth.



Nancy welcomes the volunteers' new freezer as they prepare to shelter in place.

Jenna shares a sticker with a young patient in the Care-A-Van.





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## SISTERS OF BON SECOURS USA

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry  
1525 Marriottsville Road  
Marriottsville, MD 21104

### Cover Photo

Left to Right:

2019-2020 Ministry Volunteers Abigail McDonough and  
Delaney Weiland paint a playground in West Baltimore.

Photo submitted by BSVM Ministry Volunteers



## 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 mailed directly to:

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry  
1525 Marriottsville Road, Marriottsville, MD 21104

or

Visit our website: [bonsecours.us/volunteers/donate/](https://bonsecours.us/volunteers/donate/)

And click the **Donate** button

**BSVM Staff:** Shannon Curran, Director; Olivia Steback, Program Manager; Emily Thrush, Site Leader; Paula Hastings, Volunteer Recruiter; Liesel Rupprecht, Program Coordinator