

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Fall 2020

Issue 32



Heart Hugs

By Delaney Weiland, 2019-2020 Volunteer
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame



Delaney Weiland

A theology professor in college once asked us to draw the God to whom we prayed. I thought about drawing parts of nature I felt connected to, like mountains and forests, or drawing holding hands to emulate the love and special people that God placed in my life. However, nothing seemed to jive super well. So, I closed my eyes, clasped my hands, and tried to pray. Why none of these images were encapsulating my God became embarrassingly clear: the God I was praying to looked less like mountains and more like the Mr. Clean man. To me, God was a bald man that sat in the sky and looked down on the world.

I had reflected before about seeing Christ in those around me, but my Mr. Clean God created a roadblock. How could a God that sat in the sky really be with and live within other humans, within me? On the flip side, who really was this loving, giving, light- and grace-filled God? What did it mean to have a relationship with Christ?

Joy Aker, our spiritual director and BSVM retreat leader, helped me challenge my stagnant, distant image of God. She led a meditation at a retreat that called the BSVM ministry volunteers to meditate with a different image of God than we normally did. She threw out a couple of suggestions and one stood out to me: *Light. Feel God's warm light, a light that is hugging your heart. Feel that light as it embraces you.* This image felt like an invitation to get to know a God that cares, that loves. The warmth of the morning sun as Elizabeth and I walked to service in the morning hugged my heart, as did the daily wave from a little girl walking to school. Those were 2 God hugs right there—even before 8am!

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Editor's Corner
Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



*I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.*

*I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
and I still don't know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?
– Rainer Maria Rilke*

In the poem above, Rilke describes the cyclical nature of life. Our culture emphasizes efficient, linear perceptions and approaches to life events. As a result, we often see our lives, the events we experience, and our relationships in a similar way. If we take time to observe nature and listen to how the earth moves, we will find that life moves in cycles. From the movement of the planets to the change of seasons, all of creation is held in renewing patterns of circles.

The reciprocity of compassion and love that the volunteers experience in service is cyclical as well. The welcome and open heartedness of the people with whom they serve softens their hearts and they respond in kind. This continuous circle of giving and receiving opens space for relationship. In her reflection, 2019-2020 BSVM Ministry Volunteer Madison Neumaier describes how her life was changed by such a relationship. Madi introduces us to a patient in the Behavioral Health Unit of Richmond Community Hospital. The woman we meet was once a volunteer herself, serving people who were incarcerated. Now, as she moves through the cycle of her life, she finds herself in need of help as she struggles with mental illness. The love that she shared in her life continues to radiate from her and touches Madi.

As you read Delaney Weiland's reflection, you will see how her image of God moves away from a hierarchical understanding of the divine (a linear view of God) to the loving embrace of a God who moves within the spaces of our lives. During her time with BSVM, she is asked to reflect upon her spirituality in new ways, integrating her faith life with her experiences of service. She shares about the daily events of her life and how these events lead her to a different understanding of God. This, in turn, brings her into closer relationship with God. I am sure we can all relate to this cycle – our hearts, at times, forget that God loves us, but then our experiences with others draw us back into God's embrace over and over again.



The children at the Bon Secours Family Support Center develop a new image of God for Delaney.

Finally, we reflect on the cycle that Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry experiences each year. As many of you know, we follow a schedule similar to the academic year, starting at the end of August with volunteer orientation and concluding by saying good-bye to our volunteers in July. In this edition, you will read about the conclusion of the 2019-2020 service year and opening of the 2020 –2021 year. Both our closing ceremony and commissioning were held over Zoom, they ended with heartfelt words and wishes that we could hug in person. Like many in this time of pandemic, we were physically distant, and yet, we were (and are) touched by God's grace, a grace that transcends the spaces that separate us and moves within the cycles of our lives.



Madison Neumaier

Finding Myself Through Connecting With Others

By Madison Neumaier, 2019-2020 Volunteer
A graduate of Loyola Marymount University

When I first started my year of service with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, I was nervous. After I decided to pursue a year of service, I had spent hours researching programs, meeting with recruiters, and chatting with volunteers. What initially drew me to BSVM was the ministry’s intentionality. Being a volunteer with BSVM is about more than choosing to serve. Volunteers intentionally live in the neighborhoods where they serve, intentionally commit to live in radical solidarity with people who face economic injustice, and intentionally work to understand the injustices that challenge the communities in which they serve.

When I decided to be a Bon Secours Ministry Volunteer, I consciously committed to these aspects of the program. I was excited to be a part of a community that values justice, solidarity, and service. I wanted to lean into the discomfort that comes along with serving in an intentional and just way. Growth necessitates embracing the uncomfortable and deciding to fully pursue opportunities for personal development. Pursuing a year of service with BSVM provided me with the perfect opportunity to fully dive deep into not only service and justice, but also into these aspects of personal growth.

In our first month of service with BSVM, as part of our spiritual formation curriculum, we were asked to read *Becoming Who You Are*, a book by Fr. James Martin, SJ. In his book, Martin uses insights from Thomas Merton and other spiritual writers to emphasize the importance of moving towards what Merton calls our “true self.” Martin argues that through embracing your individuality, you slowly reveal your own personal brand of holiness. Martin claims our personalities are made fuller and more holy through accepting the ways God calls us to be ourselves. Spiritual growth does not necessitate perfect worship or praying in a specific way. In fact, in searching for our true selves, we are called to embrace imperfection and bring our whole, broken selves into our spiritual lives. In other words, through paying careful attention to ourselves and our desires, we can become who we are truly meant to be. This year, pursuing personal growth has meant embracing the moments in which I have felt most myself. In connecting with others, I have been better able to understand myself. This process of connection has undoubtedly contributed to both my spiritual growth and personal development.

With BSVM, I served by striving to be a compassionate presence within my ministry placement site, the Behavioral Health Unit at Richmond Community Hospital (RCH). As a volunteer, I accompanied behavioral health patients during their stay at RCH. I built relationships with patients and staff. On my first day of service, I met an 85-year-old patient who had been admitted several months prior. In total, this patient stayed at RCH for just over 6 months. Prior to being admitted to the hospital, this patient had been actively involved in her community for years. She had previously served as a volunteer with incarcerated populations and in nursing homes. Her role as a patient, however, was new to her. Despite her circumstances, she continually went out of her way to make others feel welcome. Prior to her discharge, I saw her every day. Each time I arrived at my service site, I looked forward to the time we would share together. In describing her own previous volunteer experiences, she taught me about service and, through her everyday actions, she exemplified what it means to connect with people in an authentic way.



**“I served by striving to be a compassionate presence within my ministry placement site, the Behavioral Health Unit at Richmond Community Hospital (RCH).”
- Madison**

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Sisters' Corner

Community in a Time of Social Distance

By Emily Thrush, BSVM Site Leader

How do we build community even when we are physically distancing ourselves? We rely on creativity, technology, and extra helpings of grace to navigate uncharted waters. During the global public health crisis in 2020, BSVM staff and volunteers had to adapt with the rest of the world to establish new norms and new accommodations to our typical rhythms so that we could stay connected and safe.

With the challenge of physical distancing requirements, our conception of community had to expand to include the notion of building relationships through the use of technology instead of relying on physical proximity. We shifted our prior plans of in-person retreats and gatherings to join together over video conferencing platforms.

In April, we invited BSVM alumni to gather to celebrate 20 years of ministry. Our retreat leader, Joy Aker, led some alumni in a reflection over Zoom, and the current volunteers joined sisters and alumni in a social gathering over Zoom to share stories of community life and creative responses to physical distancing. In May, sisters spent time with both houses (in Baltimore and Richmond) over Zoom for conversations on the sisters' Mission Focus Statement. At the end of the service year, sisters were able to join the volunteers, friends, colleagues, and family in their local farewell services (again, over Zoom) in which volunteers shared their closing reflections that focused on an aspect of their transformation through service with others.

When our 2020-2021 community of ministry volunteers arrived in August, the sisters were again able to meet with the volunteers virtually. They joined us for a 'meet and greet' during orientation as well as for the online commissioning of the new volunteers.

We do not know how long we will have to adapt to safety restrictions while living in a pandemic time, but we do know that relationships can be built and maintained through virtual meetings, phone calls, video chats, and other remote options. We are grateful that we live in a time that gives us options to connect over distances, and we will continue to look for creative ways to live compassionately, to receive and offer healing, and to share in liberation.



Sisters of Bon Secours commission our 2020—2021 volunteers.

Why I Stayed

Paula Hastings, 2018 - 2019 Alum and Current Volunteer Recruiter

I learned about and practiced accompaniment. I use that skill every day- and will continue to use it for the rest of my life.

~Paula Hastings



Paula laughs with clients she met on the Behavioral Health Floor of the Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital.



Narda Salinas, BSVM 2017 –2018, and Paula Hastings spread the word about BSVM at a service fair hosted by St. Edward’s University.

During my closing reflection for Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, written a little over a year ago, I reflected on the new meaning of compassion that had begun to take shape during my volunteer year. I had come to know that in addition to the literal translation ‘to suffer with’, compassion means to share in passions and interests with others. I reflected on how my relationships developed with my community members and those with whom I served through sharing our interests and learning one another’s passions.

Now, after my first year of serving as the volunteer recruiter for BSVM, this feels truer still. It has been a continuation of what Shannon calls “compassion boot camp” that began during my year as a BSVM Ministry Volunteer. I get to spend most of my time talking with students and university staff who are passionate about service, justice, and spirituality. It is incredibly life-giving to see someone’s face light up when they talk about a service trip they went on, or a retreat they attended, and how these experiences are leading them towards a year of service. Accompanying prospective volunteers on their discernment journeys is truly God-filled work. While it is definitely different to be a BSVM staff member than it was to be a volunteer, it is a gift to remain with a ministry and charism that has shaped and is continuing to shape me.

Another wonderful gift of this past year has been the broader connection with the Catholic Volunteer Network (CVN) community. When working with other CVN recruiters, I get to hear about their volunteer experiences, and feel the support of a large community of other people going through “post service year syndrome.” That network includes, of course, my BSVM ’18-19 community members, but I have the extra bonus of CVN colleagues as well. It is such a blessing to be surrounded by and work with people every day that are passionate about faith-based service.

Finally, I have the opportunity to intentionally reflect on my volunteer year as part of my job. A question I get a lot from prospective students is, “What was your favorite part of BSVM?” Honestly, my answer to that question changes almost every time. Some days it is the lifelong relationships with my ’18-19 community members. Sometimes it is the strengthening of my relationship with God. Sometimes it is the stories from the people on the Behavioral Health floor of Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital. Whichever gift is speaking to me that day, however, there is always a theme: it was a transformative experience. I learned about and practiced accompaniment. I use that skill every day, and will continue to use it for the rest of my life.

2019 - 2020 Closes in a Uniquely Virtual Way

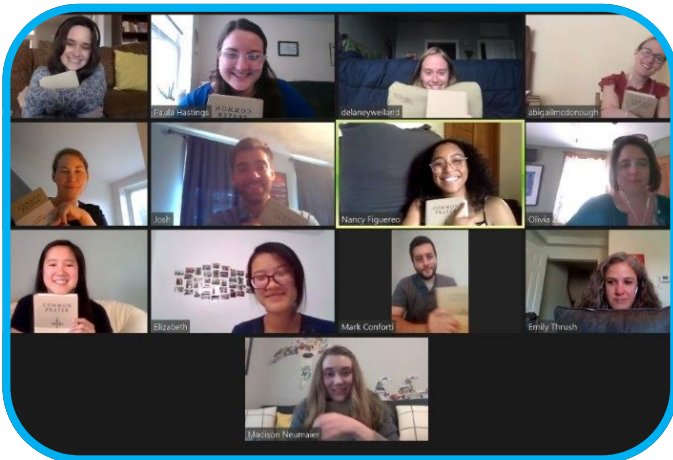
As mentioned at the beginning of this issue, we said a virtual good-bye to our 2019-2020 ministry volunteers. We concluded our time together by spending several days processing and reflecting upon the year, synthesizing lessons from each BSVM pillar using online video conferencing. Our local farewells and formal closing ceremony occurred on Zoom as well. This new and unexpected way of ending the service year led us to new and unexpected learnings! We found that although it was difficult to be physically apart for many reasons, blessings still appeared. For example, family members and friends who could not have physically traveled for these events were able to attend virtually. BSVM staff was given the opportunity to change the format of the celebrations and to try new ways to meaningfully integrate past pieces of the ceremonies into online platforms.

Please read Director Shannon Curran's reflection from our closing ceremony on page 7. We also share photos from the past year, images of past closing ceremonies, and excerpts from prayers and reflections that our 2019 – 2020 ministry volunteers wrote for the closing ceremony.



Madison and Jenna enjoy a summer day in Richmond as the year comes to an end.

So here I am, being courageous and brave, telling you my story and my struggle of making the sisters' charism of living Compassionately, receiving and offering Healing, and sharing in Liberation a deeply personal journey. ~ Jenna Vrable



2019 – 2020 ministry volunteers say good-bye to each other and their year of service via Zoom. They take a final photo with BSVM staff and a gift from BSVM, a copy of *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*.

Matthew 25 tells us that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Jesus. Acting as stewards of our Earth and keepers of our brothers and sisters, especially the least among us, is the first step towards practicing God's justice. ~ Joshua Gillen

I pray that we may never forget the stories we have heard this year and the people who have touched our lives in big and small ways. May we continue to make the conscious choice to tread lightly on the earth and live with intentionality. And may we remember that we are all inextricably linked together through the human experience. ~ Abigail McDonough



Shannon Curran

2019 - 2020 Closing Reflection

By Shannon Curran, Director

Fr. Greg Boyle's *Barking to the Choir* calls to mind, for me, Paul's letters to the Corinthians. One thing that Paul reveals in these letters is how God's preference for weakness serves as a catalyst for the Corinthians both to become known by God (1 Cor 8:3) and to know God by becoming God's justice (2 Cor 5:21).

Our reading today is from the second chapter of *Barking to the Choir*. Just prior to this, in chapter one, Fr. Boyle writes about how "during Advent, we are called to prepare the way...to 'make straight the path' and make smooth what is rocky" (18). He goes on to write that: "Our hardwiring is such that we hear these invitations as a demand to 'straighten up' or 'get our act together'. But it's not *we* who needs changing --- it's our crooked path that needs to be smoothed...so we can be reached by God's tenderness"(19).

This smoothing of our path that Fr. Boyle writes about occurs through the process of allowing ourselves to be opened by God.

The "it's not we who needs changing" is felt in the process of becoming known by God (1 Cor. 8:3) and recognizing ourselves and others as a children of God.

The *we are enoughness* is felt in moments of being "reached by God's tenderness."

Volunteers, last week I mentioned that, when we look at *Barking to the Choir* from a perspective of spiritual formation, it is striking how much you have in common with the young men and women with whom Fr. Boyle works and who work with Fr. Boyle.

Homeboy Industries is a ministry. B SVM is a ministry. They may seem like very different ministries, yet they share the same root: God's preference for weakness or vulnerability serves as a catalyst for God's people both to become known by God (1 Cor 8:3) and to know God by becoming God's justice (2 Cor 5:21).



2015 - 2016 ministry volunteers share a parting gift from B SVM.

If it is not clear by now, and it might not be because you are in the middle of it, the formation work with which you have been engaged is much more than books that we read, films that we watch, or podcasts that we listen to. From your application process to reading your handbook to the moment you arrive on move-in day, everything that we do together is formation. While the heaviest hitters of formation are your time in service, in community, and in prayer, everything is formation and all of it is to support you in opening yourself to smoothing that path.

We are grateful to how each of you have allowed the Spirit, in so many different ways, to clear and smooth the path to receiving God's tenderness. In so doing, you also clear and smooth the path for us and others to receive God's tenderness.

The reflections you share give witness to this process of making contact with God or becoming known by God. Which brings us to, "Holy Befold" (35).

Right before our eyes, volunteers, you ring out: The holy is happening (35).

Heart Hugs

Continued from Cover

Elizabeth and I opened the door of Bon Secours Community Works and God was waiting with a few more—heart hug #1 was from the security guard Mr. Roger’s warm welcome, asking how our weekend was. Then there was Miss Yolanda’s smiley greeting, sharing videos of her grandkids and asking if we’d watched any of her movie recommendations. Of course, Miss Joyce’s heart hug often translated into an actual hug, even when she was stressed and hustling to get the classroom set up. Those heart hugs were abounding once 9:00am hit and baby Rachel ran into the classroom with a package of wipes, eager to help out her teachers. Destiny’s mom’s heart hug often meant sharing a goofy video of her 12 month old trying to eat a slice of pizza, a warm invitation to join in on the laughs.

As the day continued, sometimes my crankiness shielded my heart from recognizing the hugs, but they were still there. Those hugs were also waiting when I got home— showing up in the shared joy with community members from cutting an onion without crying and a random dance party (without music) with Abby and Elizabeth in the kitchen. The best heart hug was courtesy of Elizabeth, when cookies fresh out of the oven, baked with love, concluded our night.

This image of an embracing light, one that hugs our hearts, calls me to notice the connections that God gifts me throughout the day. This image calls me to refocus how I have been viewing God, to see God as a loving creator who communicates through gifts of grace and wants to develop a friendship with me. At the same time, this year has been a reminder that God invites me (and the rest of humanity) to see God as more than just a recipient of a personal relationship. God calls us to see Christ’s life as a guide with which to treat all of creation with love and care.

One line in *Called to Community*, a book of essays that B SVM reads together to enhance community life, continues to come back to me when thinking about this call to learn from Christ’s life:

“To be sure, people throughout the ages have known that this building up of a social order in which one need not worry anymore was originally Christ’s will.” – Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt

The creation of a social order where no one needs to worry. Maybe this was Christ calling us to address the wounds that marginalization and racism and poverty have left in our country. Maybe this was Christ calling us to meet that injustice with compassionate presence and a willingness to learn instead of turning away from it. Maybe this was Christ’s way of calling humans to hug each other’s hearts, too.

Finding Myself Through Connecting

With Others

Continued from page 3

Service that is grounded in justice fosters relationships built on the understanding that compassionate presence is mutually beneficial. Fostering these mutual connections requires vulnerability and authenticity. In serving justly, we are called to be our true selves. At 85 years old, this patient understood this completely. She taught me about what it means not only to be yourself, but to let this understanding guide you as you follow your passions. Her passions drove her to serve and to connect in a vulnerable way with others throughout her life. Although her role as a patient was new to her, she didn’t let this stop her from continuing to serve others authentically and compassionately. This patient made an effort to get to know everyone on the floor and stayed in touch with many of her fellow patients after they were discharged. She collected and hung art on the walls in the dayroom, organized markers, and tried to make everyone feel comfortable and supported. She was compassionate, resilient, and giving. Her example taught me what it means to truly and authentically be yourself.

Though I am by no means an expert on authenticity, this year has challenged me to grow and lean into vulnerable connection. By extension, spiritual growth has been integral to my experience as a B SVM volunteer. As Fr. Martin reminded me in *Becoming Who You Are*, God calls each of us to live fully into our true selves, and in that process, we draw closer to God. Through the example of those at my service site, I have learned that authentic connection is integral to building meaningful relationships. Through learning about what it means to connect with others, with God, and with myself, I have grown insurmountably, and it is a journey towards my true self that will continue well beyond this year of service.

We Welcome Our 2020-2021 Ministry Volunteers



Destiny Cates
Chesapeake, VA
College of William and Mary



Mikayla Haeefe
Pioneer, CA
Middlebury College



Annelise Howick
St. John's, FL
Stonehill College



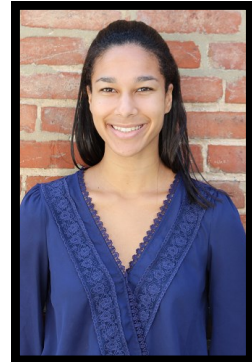
Kelly Flynn
Ridley Park, PA
St. Joseph's University



Brion Harris
Amityville, NY
University of Scranton



Tuzo Mwarubma
Stillwater, OK
Vanderbilt University



Sara Snowden
Seattle, WA
Santa Clara University



2020—2021 BSVM Commissioning Ceremony



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Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
1525 Marriottsville Road
Marriottsville, MD 21104

Cover Photo

2020-2021 Ministry Volunteer Mikayla Haefele participates in BSVM's online commissioning ceremony.

Photo taken by Emily Thrush, Site Leader



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 individuals in their personal and communal journeys towards transformation through service with others.

To nurture this transformative journey, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry supports individuals through a year of spiritual formation. The ministry is structured with five pillars that support this growth. Volunteers commit to: grow spiritually, develop an intentional community, live simply, practice God's justice, and learn through service with others. Throughout this year, volunteers discover that by sharing the charism of compassion, healing, and liberation with others they, in turn, receive the charism from those they serve.

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, or schedule a time to visit our community outside or over Zoom.

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. Monetary donations or gently used furnishings for the volunteer houses 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/
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