

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Winter 2021

Issue 33



Community: A Commitment That Extends Beyond Roommates

By Kelly Flynn, 2020 - 2021 Volunteer
A graduate of St. Joseph's University



Kelly Flynn

As we crossed the street to the playground of Stuart Hill Elementary, I felt silly having never played four square before. However, I was reassured by Sara, Brion and Tuzo, who just 3 weeks ago were complete strangers, that I would pick up the game pretty quickly. For that next hour and a half any bystander walking by might be confused by four young adults laughing while playing an extremely intense game of four square on an empty playground. To me, I was getting a taste of what it was like to be a part of a community.

Beyond four square and other games, community life includes community prayer, sharing meals, and sharing in our own personal journeys together. Living together in the time of Covid-19 means that we are home together every day. With that in mind, I feel as if the commitment to living in community is one of the most meaningful pillars to me during this time. Through our quarantine period together, I noticed how quickly we began to open up to one another and form foundations for relationships that will continue to grow for the remainder of our volunteer year.

As we generally operate on the same schedule, we are able to eat together each night. This has been something I have found to be a particularly important part of our community life together. In late September, I was fortunate enough to travel home for my sister's wedding and upon returning to Baltimore began to quarantine for two weeks.

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Editor's Corner

Olivia Steback

BSVM Program Manager



The same everlasting [Mother] who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day. Either she will shield you from suffering or give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then and put aside all anxious thought and imaginings.

~ St. Francis de Sales

At this time last year, how could any of us imagine what struggles lay ahead? Often, we spend energy imagining and worrying about events that never take place. It's the challenges that we do not anticipate that catch us by surprise and test us in ways we could not expect. We have spent much of 2020 facing the unforeseen events of COVID-19. At the same time, just as St. Francis de Sales wrote several hundred years ago, our God has been with us through it all. Not only that, God has been present to us in unexpected ways. Take a moment to reflect, how has God visited you in new and surprising ways these past nine months since the pandemic began?

In this edition of *The Companion*, two current ministry volunteers and alum, Claire Kimilu (BSVM 2017 -2018) share ways in which God has surprisingly entered their lives. Claire describes how taking time to slow down and to simply be with God changed her life during her time with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, and how this act of surrender continues to foster her relationship with God.

It was in those moments of release that God would surprise me in my encounters with my community members, neighbors, and the wonders of creation. In what has been a chaotic and uncertain period, this gift of stillness has helped me to find peace.

~ Claire Kimilu, BSVM 2017 - 2018

Current volunteers Kelly Flynn and Mikayla Haefele also notice ways God continues to enter their lives through the people they meet in service and their community members. In one instance, Kelly shares how her community members cooked dinner for her every day during her time in travel quarantine, never asking to be repaid in any way. God's love moved through their generosity not despite her circumstances **but as a direct result of them.** Their understanding of God's presence is also echoed in the writings of Bob Shenk, a past BSVM Site Supervisor. He, too, sees the connection between service and God's presence.



Claire hugs her uncle during the 2018 Closing Ceremony.

During her Commissioning Reflection, Director Shannon Curran welcomes the 2020-2021 volunteers by inviting them into what Dorothy Day called "the greatest challenge of the day... a revolution of the heart." This revolution of our own hearts "starts with each one of us" and is fueled by receiving God's love and sharing God's love. Each time we come to the realization that God is always caring for us, that we're important to God (as a high schooler shared with Mikayla) our spirits are invited to be at peace. God beckons us to let go of the anxiety and fear that can so easily take hold of us during such uncertain and scary times. May we all remember to carve out moments of stillness so that we may be able to hear God's voice amidst the noise of all that surrounds us. Let us have the courage to hold the prayer of St. Frances de Sales in our hearts and be at peace.

Serving With Others, When Book Smarts Don't Suffice

By Mikayla Haefele, 2020 - 2021 Volunteer

A graduate of Middlebury College



Mikayla Haefele

“I’m grateful for myself,” said a tenth grader when a group of students went around the room sharing reasons why they are thankful. Later in the week the theme of gratefulness arose once more and this young

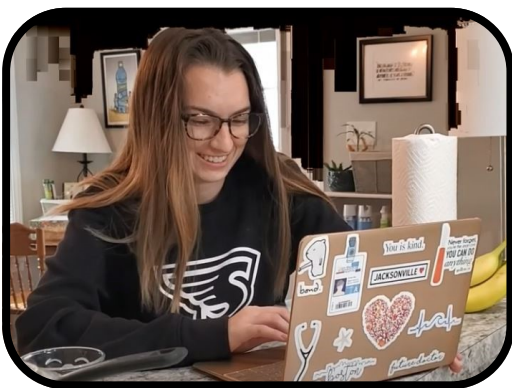


Mikayla also serves with Shalom Farms.

woman repeated, “I’m grateful for myself.” The first time she spoke those words I thought she was simply making a joke when prompted to express gratitude, but when pressed for an explanation of her statement she made it clear that she is grateful for herself since everybody else in life has let her down. I don’t know this particular student’s personal story very well, so I am unsure if she comes from a home that is unsupportive or if perhaps she has lost a parent or otherwise has had something happen to her to make her feel like she can only trust herself. What I do know is that the way she expressed herself left me feeling uncomfortable, sad, and a bit helpless.

I have been aware of many of the soul-crushing problems in society for some time now, but hearing the brokenness pour forth from someone so young was both heartbreaking and eye-opening for someone like me whose knowledge of systemic issues has been mostly relegated to book knowledge. In my college years, my book learning led me to greater knowledge of society’s most pressing issues, such as systemic racism, economic inequality, and food insecurity. I never would have claimed that I had all the answers to any of these problems, but I was confident that I had the right opinion about them and that I could elucidate some of the historical developments that led us to the broken and unjust society that we see today. I thought that the act of being educated about these issues was enough to demonstrate that I cared about these problems and wanted to see them corrected.

My time in college might have left me with knowledge about racism or poverty, but book knowledge is not the same as actively witnessing the effects of injustice. When I started working with the students at Cristo Rey Richmond High School – a Jesuit school that provides students from underserved populations with work experience and college preparatory academics – I quickly recognized that knowing about injustice and seeing how injustice impacts lives of those in the community in which I live are two very different things.



Annelise joins her BSVM community in serving at Cristo Rey Richmond High School via online platforms.

My time serving at Cristo Rey has taught me that it is possible to know something without truly understanding it, or without allowing it to affect me. In other words, what I have been learning through working with the high school students is that there are times when “book smarts” simply do not suffice. It is not enough to objectively know that people face injustices on a daily basis. I have to move beyond objective knowing and get to know people on a personal basis and let them uncover their story. Only then do the issues they face become tangible to me.

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Commissioning Reflection

By Shannon Curran, Director Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry



Shannon Curran

At the beginning of each service year during Commissioning, Shannon Curran welcomes the new ministry volunteers. She sets the tone for the year and invites the volunteers to reflect upon their future with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Although the venue was different this year (Zoom), her invitation to embrace BSVM's mission remained the same. Below are her words of inspiration.

"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us." Dorothy Day wrote these words decades ago. Of course, they continue to ring true.

Volunteers, we welcome you and we thank you for stepping into this greatest challenge of the day. The mission of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is "transformation through service with others." When people first learn about BSVM they often think that this transformation refers to change that volunteers accomplish through service. Once people come to know BSVM more fully, though, they uncover that our mission speaks to the transformation that occurs in each volunteer's life. Volunteers, when you chose to be immersed in the Bon Secours charism of compassion, healing, and liberation, you chose to bring about a revolution of the heart.

Let's be careful not to fall into the easy thinking and easy living that acts of service and calls for justice alone fuel this revolution.

Dorothy Day's whole life was one of service and justice; therefore, we better believe it when, over and over again, she makes clear how to bring about this revolution. As we just heard in these three excerpts, she writes:

1. "...there is nothing that we can do but love..."
2. Whether we view acts of service and justice as throwing our pebble in the pond, laying one brick at a time, or taking one step. All we can do, Day writes, is "beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform these actions."
3. And, finally, in the third excerpt, she writes "all these means, even prayer, are useless unless animated by love."



In her book, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, Catholic theologian M. Shawn Copeland echoes what we heard from Dorothy Day. Copeland writes:

"The cross of Jesus calls us to conversion, to radical transformation of life for life. For his cross teaches us that conversion of life is not merely something about which we speak; rather, despite whatever consequences, the *living out* and *living out of* that transformation is the subject of our daily struggle. Lived conversion of heart, mind, and action is not what someone else must do, but who we must become. For it is in *our* social dis-order, not someone else's, that social oppression has taken root. It is *our* consciousness, not someone else's, that is permeated with and troubled by disgraces of social sin. The cross of the Jewish Jesus evokes our integrity, calls us to responsibility for one another, [and] calls us to entrust our lives to the dangerous Jesus." (xxiv)

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Welcome

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Volunteers, you've responded to this call of the cross. As Day demonstrated with her life devoted to tending the wounds of the crucified Christ and Copeland demonstrates with her work focused on the witness of the African American religious experience, the Way of Christ is to be walked — not talked.

It's a walk that you've already encountered while quarantining with strangers and, in caring for them, coming to know your community of fellow volunteers. It's a walk you will encounter as you realize that each decision you make is one for the community and not for just yourself as an individual. It's the walk of showing up in creative ways to build community and companionship while protecting those most at risk of Covid. For just as this country's response to Covid has exacerbated all of the many fault lines and inequities in our society, it is also pushing community life front and center. All in all, it's days full of choices to live compassionately, to receive and offer healing, and to share in liberation.

We welcome you into this greatest challenge of the day. We thank you for choosing to bring about a revolution of the heart – a revolution of your own heart. As you do so, you guide each of us in the revolution of our own hearts. For this and for you, we are grateful.



Destiny receives a blessing during the 2020-2021 Commissioning Ceremony.

Commitment That Extends Beyond Roommates

Continued from Cover

Within those two weeks I was physically apart from the normal community living practices, including sharing meals with the community. Although I was not with my community, they cooked for me each night and even covered the nights that I would typically cook for them without hesitation or discussion around the subject. There was no expectation that I would cook anything in return when I was able to leave my personal quarantine, just a welcoming back to the dinner table.

I found this giving of meals and continued practice of shared dinner to be one of my favorite aspects of community. While some community members had more experience in the kitchen than others, there is a lot of grace and acceptance in trying new recipes and learning to cook with one another. By the end of a meal, we have shared stories and laughs, and debriefed with each other about our day and service experiences. Knowing that we have that space together each day makes the act of sharing a meal more special and meaningful, and makes it something that I look forward to every day.

Overall, community life has been a refreshing experience. After college, I was feeling tired of living among other people and, while I was drawn to community life, I was also incredibly nervous. What was missing with some past roommates perhaps was the intentionality that I have found within this BSVM community. Living in community with Bon Secours is living beyond having “roommates”, and for that I am thankful. My experience with roommates in the past was very much one of living **among** others rather than living **with** others. Rather than the individualistic arrangement that I have lived in previously, my community life with Bon Secours is one that provides the opportunity to integrate my life with the life of others. Our community shares a part of each day creating relationships that extend beyond the surface. I feel comforted knowing that I have three other people who can understand my experiences from day to day and with whom I can share in the highs and lows of what we experience together.

Alumni Profile

Claire Kimilu, BSVM 2017 - 2018

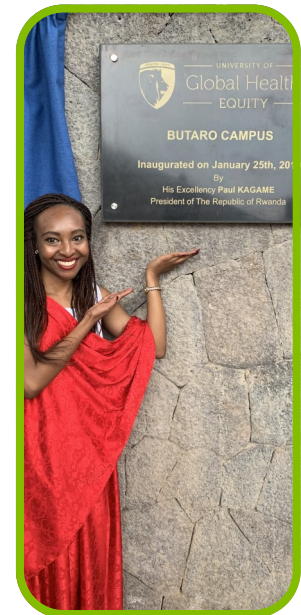


BSVM alum, Claire Kimilu, has been an active and faithful alum. As she mentions below, following her year with BSVM Claire completed a master's program in Global Health Delivery at the University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda (left and below). Currently, Claire continues to follow her passion for Global Health while working for the World Health Organization.

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

My experience with BSVM challenged me in a sense to unlearn what I “knew” and to open myself up to the experiences of those around me. Rather than simply giving me an opportunity to serve others, BSVM showed me the power of *servicing with*—allowing me to see that those whom we aim to serve are actually our **partners** in the pursuit of social justice and sustainable change. While I served in the Outpatient Mental Health Clinic, I had the privilege of collaborating with patients in the Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) on initiatives to create a more patient-centered environment. This was my first experience of co-creation and one that inspired me to consider how health programming and policy could be more closely aligned with the needs and lived experiences of communities.

My time in Baltimore led me to Rwanda where I would continue to explore this community-based approach while completing a master's program in Global Health Delivery at the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE). Throughout the year, I was blessed again with opportunities to listen, learn from, and walk with those in my community. Coming full circle, my year culminated with practicum research aimed at helping to understand the local community, its needs, and expectations as UGHE sought to co-develop its community engagement programming in the rural community of Butaro. Through this life-giving experience, I was reminded of BSVM and the Spirit deepening my desire to *serve with*. This calling continues to guide me toward work which aims to amplify the voices of the neglected and ensure that communities are included in health program design and policy-making processes.



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

As I reflect on my BSVM experience, I am recognizing that the journey of processing continues long after the year is complete. There are still conversations left to be shared and areas in which I am still yearning to understand—being moved to inwardly examine. Even current events can propel me back to memories and experiences of my time in Baltimore. What has helped me through this process has been remaining connected to my 2017-2018 BSVM community, sharing those moments of life post-service which bring me back to Baltimore and continuing some of the conversations we began as a community. Whether through a phone call or a group video chat, I always find opportunities to re-connect with my community to be a source of renewal.

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Another piece of advice I would share is to remember to take time to pause and simply be. As we return to the hustle of life, it can be easy to slip back into the routine of distractions and noise that once again surround us—to lose sight of the gift of being present. Taking the time to pray with an Examen during a break or journal as I unwind has offered me opportunities to continue to step back and recognize the ways in which God works throughout my day and in subtle moments.

What reading have you found to be informative, helpful and/or inspirational for volunteers in the BSVM formation materials or for those wishing to explore the pillars of BSVM?

I recently revisited a book we reflected on during my year of service as part of BSVM’s formation materials, *Not All of Us Are Saints* by David Hilfiker. At the time, I remember being drawn to Hilfiker’s words because of the ways they seemed to parallel my own experiences navigating life in Southwest Baltimore (SOWEBO). When I first arrived in SOWEBO, I was eager to be an activist and changemaker—ready to serve the neglected and vulnerable. I had such a sense of hope and optimism—a feeling of “lightness.”

As my relationships with the patients at my service site and my neighbors deepened through the year, I came to face the inner conflicts that come with experiencing injustice on a personal level. I grappled with an array of feelings from outward frustration at broken systems and social structures to inward feelings of guilt and shame when considering my own privilege and the ways I could have—and perhaps did—contribute to perpetuating the very injustices I recognized in my daily encounters. *Not All of Us Are Saints* helped me to accept those feelings and struggles as reminders of my own humanity. Three years later, I find Dr. Hilfiker’s words giving me another opportunity to inwardly reflect on my journey of service and my humanity. In this second encounter, I find Dr. Hilfiker’s words particularly calling me to consider what it means to remain compassionate and hopeful even in the midst of situations which portray cynicism or a societal numbness to injustice.

What were some of the gifts you received during your time of service? Have any of these gifts helped you specifically during this time of pandemic?

My year of service taught me to “be still..” (Psalm 46:10). It gave me the gift of simply being—of taking time to pause from the constant hustle of life to rediscover God in the quiet whispers and subtle moments of my days. In those moments of just “being,” I learned the power of relinquishing control and letting the Spirit move within me, through me, and sometimes even despite me. It was in those moments of release that God would surprise me in my encounters with my community members, neighbors, and the wonders of creation. In what has been a chaotic and uncertain period, this gift of stillness has helped me to find peace. As the world seemed to stop, this gift of simply being present enabled me to accept our new reality—one contrary to the mentality which prioritizes constant action and productivity. It helped me to find life-giving moments even in the mundane and to see God even in the raging storm.



Claire visits her fellow 2017 –2018 BSVM community member, Ruby Miller.

Sisters' Corner

BSVM Joins Sisters Fall Assembly By Olivia Steback, Program Manager

In November 2020, ministry volunteers in both Baltimore, MD and Richmond, VA and BSVM staff joined the sisters via Zoom during their fall assembly to share and learn about white privilege.

We opened with a meaningful prayer led by Sr. Dorothy Brogan, CBS. She invited the participants to share around their understanding and experience of white privilege. Dr. Theodora Balis, a staff member at Grace Medical Center – formerly Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital – then presented content and facilitated further discussion. She encouraged the group to explore how personal bias and the cultural norms of mainstream society contribute to the continuation of racism. Finally, we concluded with a panel discussion in which several colleagues of Dr. Balis, as well as Dr. Brenda A. Nelson, Regional Program Coordinator for Bon Secours Associate Ministry, shared their thoughts on how we may, as individuals and collectively, work towards ending racism.



Ministry volunteers in Baltimore join the sisters at a rally for racial equality, another way BSVM has walked with the sisters in their commitment to God's Justice.

As deep wounds and the violence of racism continues to surface in this present day, we are called to respond in new ways. We are called to look both inwardly and outwardly to identify how racism is deeply imbedded in our culture, our society, and our person. BSVM is grateful that the sisters created space to do this work during their time together in the fall and that they invited BSVM, along with others, to join them. It speaks to their commitment to God's justice, a commitment that spans centuries as they continue to live out their charism of compassion, healing, and liberation. Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is blessed to be witnesses to that commitment and to walk with the sisters as we all struggle to end the evils of racism.

Serving With Others, When Book Smarts Don't Suffice

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Recently, I worked with one young high schooler who shared with me some important and difficult details of her life. She expressed her fears about how others would perceive her since she is the daughter of immigrant parents and how those fears drive her to do her best work so people will not question whether she has the right to live here. On top of those struggles around identity and belonging, she also described the anxiety she faces regarding whether or not she will have a stable place to live or food to eat as her parents are not always able to bring in a reliable income. The xenophobia and economic insecurity that haunt this young woman's life suddenly felt more real because I could see and hear how they affect her.

When I see and hear about the lives of other people, I am moved to see the issues in our society not as abstract problems, but as concrete issues that impact the lives of people in my own house, in my community in the East End, and in the city of Richmond and beyond. Once I see these issues as more concrete, then I am more strongly inclined to *do* something, to attempt to be a compassionate presence and listening ear when someone opens up about the obstacles they face. I know I will not be able to resolve the injustices that the students of Cristo Rey face, but I am learning day by day how to be more compassionate, to empathize with them, and to commit to not turn a blind eye as we share our lives together.



Bob Shenk

Blessed by Presence By Bob Shenk, M.Div, BCC

During the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 service years, Bob Shenk, Chaplain Professional Development Specialist, was a supportive and caring Site Supervisor. In the reflection below, he speaks of gifts received during his time with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. We are deeply grateful for Bob. He understands the connection of faith and service, which is at the heart of BSVM, and articulates it well!

Over the past two years, I have had the privilege of being Site Supervisor for Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry’s placement within Spiritual Care Services at Richmond Community Hospital. I have been beyond impressed by the character, maturity, and dedication of the new college grads who have dedicated a year of service to support our work. To say we have been blessed by their presence is an understatement!

I’m given pause when I think about the value of the ministry. Not only have the volunteers contributed their gifts to our work, they have provided a growth opportunity for me as a supervisor as well. It’s great that the formation process is a two-way street! This experience has provided me the opportunity to hone my supervisory and mentoring skills as I’ve coached the ministry volunteers in the work of caring for the human spirit.

The primary work of our ministry volunteers has been to step into patient rooms, assess patients’ spiritual needs, and address those needs accordingly. Common interventions include empathic listening, healing presence, life story-listening, and prayer. In their preparation for the role, volunteers receive 10 weeks of training that integrates the theoretical with the practical aspects spiritual care. They apply what they learn in class during patient visitation, receiving guidance and support from our chaplain-instructors. It’s been a fun and welcome challenge for me to walk alongside them as they develop their skills and share their gifts with others.

French philosopher and political activist Simone Weil once said that “attention is the rarest and purist form of generosity.” In Spiritual Care, we strive to live up to the call to be present with those who are suffering. I am very grateful that our volunteers have brought the same attitude to their work. They have come to understand the critical importance of attending to the spiritual and emotional dimension of patient care. I am grateful to have joined them on the journey and I pray God’s continued blessings on this impactful and vital ministry going forward.



**Rebecca Judge, BSVM 2018 - 2019,
serves with Spiritual Care.**

2020 –2021, A Unique Year of Service



Sara Snowden and Tuzo Mwarubma work at Bon Secours Urban Farms in Baltimore



The volunteers in Richmond enjoy holiday time together before traveling to visit their families



The volunteers in Baltimore use their baking skills to spread Christmas joy!



Destiny Cates cooks in Richmond, VA



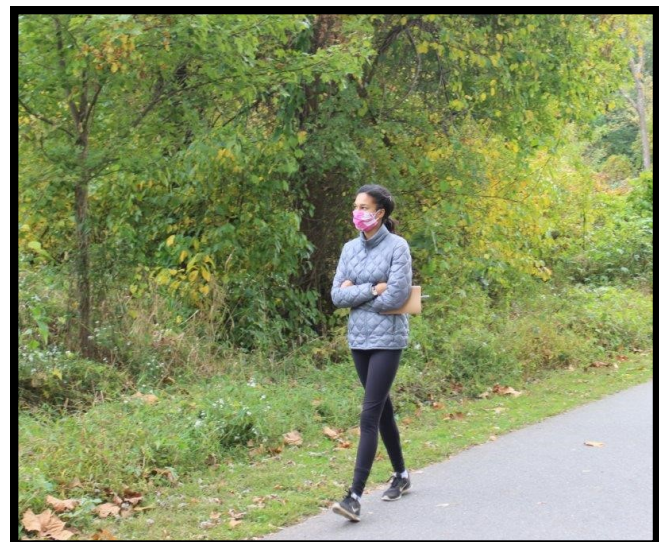
Brion Harris decorates for Christmas



Volunteers in Richmond explore their neighborhood



Mikayla Haefele lights the first candle of the Advent Wreath



Sara Snowden practices walking meditation during Fall Retreat

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
1525 Marriottsville Road
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Cover Photo

2020-2021 Ministry Volunteers Brion Harris and Kelly Flynn participate in a teambuilding activity at Genesee Valley Farm.

Photo taken by Olivia Steback, Program Manager

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

or

Venmo: @bonsecoursvolunteer

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