

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Spring 2021

Issue 34



The “Power” of Living Simply

By Sara Snowden, 2020 - 2021 Volunteer
A graduate of Santa Clara University



Sara Snowden

It was a simplicity challenge and an opportunity to develop community, both near and far, when my housemates and I decided that every other Friday during Lent we would “power down” for the evening and have an electricity free night. We thought it would simply be a manageable challenge and a chance to light some candles and relax together. We initially picked this challenge as a way to think more deeply about our unhoused neighbors without access to electricity during the cold Baltimore winter, and about those around the world without regular access to electricity. However, the first Friday we did this challenge, February 19th, happened to be the exact same day that millions of Texas residents lost power due to severe winter storms and a power grid crisis. Suddenly, our simplicity challenge became an even bigger opportunity to reflect on our reliance on electricity and the life-threatening situations that occur for those without access to this vital resource.

We had not considered the possibility that our nation would have its own energy crisis, leaving millions without electricity, safe water, or heat. As we sat together in the dark playing board games and sharing stories from our week, we thought of those whose experience of a “power down” was not by choice. We considered the vastly different experience we were having in our living room knowing that in the morning, we could flip the switch and resume our powered lives, whereas the residents of

Continued on page 5

Editor's Corner

Olivia Steback
BSVM Program Manager



As Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry moves closer to the close of our 2020 – 2021 service year, we take a look back at the changes that have taken place during the year and the essential elements of the ministry that remain the same during a time of pandemic. We have all experienced significant changes this year. As you read about the changes BSVM has experienced, I invite you to reflect on how you and your family have walked this difficult time together.

First, I ask you to consider what has remained the same in your life. What values have become clearer, more defined for you? In the pieces written by the current volunteers, you will read about experiences of present volunteers that echo similar past volunteer experiences. As Destiny and Sara speak of the pillars, *Practicing God's Justice* and *Living Simply*, their strong connections to the heart of BSVM are evident. These pillars, illustrating the values of BSVM, transcend and act as a source of strength during the challenges of a time of pandemic. You will also read a piece written by a parent of one of our alums. Paula Hastings' (BSVM '18 – '19) mother shares her experience of BSVM. She closes her piece by stating, "Trust that the spirit is leading [the volunteers] where they need to be." We've all been called to trust in a profound way this year. What values have been a source of strength for you? What and who have you trusted? What has not withstood the test from this past year and a half? What have you had to let go?

The BSVM staff and volunteers also had to let go of many things this year: expectations, past ways of doing things, and confidence in future plans were at the top of the list! At the start of the year, we made many adaptations for COVID-19 and had many hopes for the future, but no one could predict how all would unfold. One example of a happy unforeseen event is detailed in the *Sisters' Corner*. Site Leader, Emily Thrush, shares about the first time that all of volunteers (from both Richmond and Baltimore) and BSVM staff were able to gather in person. The volunteers have had many virtual gatherings and some local outdoor interactions. The contemplative retreat was our collective in-person meeting. It also included an opportunity for the volunteers to meet many of the sisters face to face. With the blessing of this gathering also came continued precautions in the forms of social distancing and mask wearing. What unexpected blessings have come your way? How have you adapted to safely make space for these blessings?



First all-BSVM picture that doesn't involve a Zoom grid!

Finally, this issue closes with words from BSVM alumni. They share the great changes that have taken place in their lives as many work on the front lines to bring healing, compassion, and liberation to patients sick with COVID-19 and their families. These alumni share how they have experienced the challenges and changes of COVID-19 through the unique perspective of a healthcare worker. As a final reflection, how may you attempt to step into the shoes of another? How might you foster compassion and empathy as you imagine

all the lives affected by the pandemic? To our alums on the frontlines (whether in healthcare, education, or social service), we say thank you: thank you for the gift of your courage, generosity, and compassion. Know that we pray for you and for all those you serve. The BSVM community is grateful for your presence, past and present.

Practicing God's Justice: Relationships over Causes

By Destiny Cates, 2020 - 2021 Volunteer

A graduate of the College of William & Mary



Destiny Cates

Before coming into my service year with BSVM, my idea of justice was that it had to be big: justice had to involve marches, speeches, or chaining yourself to a tree until you got the bad guys to relent. Because the grand and specific acts of justice were the only ones that I had in my head as examples, my forms of practicing justice always fell short. For the past three years, I have been wearing a dress all December long to fight human trafficking, sporting a red clown nose in May to raise awareness about child poverty, and giving money and social media airtime to dozens of Change.org pages. I have loved doing all these things and will continue to do them for the foreseeable future, but deep down I felt that justice had to be more than that.

My suspicions were confirmed one morning when we sat down for a Thursday morning reflection and learned about how God's justice was truly about relationships. God's relationship with humankind is bound in a covenant love modeled by God's relationship with Israel and later with Jesus' relationship with His followers on Earth. God expects us to follow that example in how we treat our created world and our created brothers and sisters in humanity. It is through deliberate, loving practices that we bring this justice to life.



Destiny takes some time to connect with nature during her contemplative retreat

Through our deliberate practice of Lent this year with BSVM, I have had the opportunity to look at how I can better honor my relationship with God, the earth, and other people. As one of my personal Lenten commitments, I chose to take shorter showers, which is definitely a sacrifice for me. Not only has this commitment to taking short showers made me more mindful of how a measured use of natural resources honors those living in scarcity, but it has also reminded me that I am connected to life outside of myself. As Pocahontas says in the Disney movie *Pocahontas*, "The rainstorm and the river are my brother. The heron and the otter are my friends; and we are all connected to each other in a circle, in a hoop that never ends." I also took time away from my free forms of media entertainment during Lent, and I replaced that time with more frequent and longer spaces of reflection. Through this Lenten practice, I heard God's wisdom, asked God honest questions, recharged my tired spirit, and just simply spent time in God's presence. As a result, I enabled myself to pour more love, attention, and compassion into my interactions with those whom I serve, especially the high school students at Cristo Rey Richmond.

Continued on page 4

Practicing God's Justice: Relationships over Causes

Continued from page 3

I have seen increased depth and connection with the students as I have tried to be deliberately present with them. A Spanish 3 office hours appointment with a 10th grader led to us sharing our mutual insecurities about Spanish fluency, since I too wrestle with self-doubt about belonging to the Latinx community. Our biweekly book club at Cristo Rey turned into a space where students felt validated - processing the stories we read together and making connections with the experiences of the teenage characters in our novel as those characters struggle with race, police brutality, religion, relationships, and more. And grading papers on a Saturday became more than just a task to check off when I used that opportunity to encourage the students to dig into their narratives and share, through their writing, more of the greatness that is already inside of them.

I am not going to win a prize for limiting water usage, refraining from watching Hulu, or for having quality conversations with 9th and 10th graders, but I can do these small, deliberate acts with great love. This is how I can practice God's relational justice. My energy does not need to focus on grand gestures with huge impact; my focus is now on what God can do through me in the relationships right in front of me, if I am only willing to let go and take God's example to heart.

DO YOU KNOW A YOUNG ADULT WHO IS:

- motivated by an open and giving spirit
- interested in practicing justice by building relationships based in service
- open to reflecting upon the connection between service and spirituality
- willing to live in community with other volunteers and to live simply during the year of service?

REFER THEM TO BSVM!

Send contact info to volunteer@bshsi.org
or fill out contact form at bit.ly/BSVMapply



Bon Secours 20
Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
Celebrating 20 Years of Service with Others
Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

The “Power” of Living Simply

Continued from Cover

Texas did not have that option. This led to conversations about the crisis in Texas, climate change, future natural disasters, and inequities that cause some communities to be more vulnerable than others to such disasters. We thought of the electricity challenges that our neighbors living in tents and abandoned buildings nearby experienced, as well as the internet instability that students we taught at Sisters Academy experienced far too often. The heightened awareness raised by the situation in Texas illuminated a reality that many Baltimore residents face during the harsh winter. Residents in Baltimore without the basic needs of electricity access are not given media attention or large-scale outpouring of support and services like the Texas response, despite the ongoing nature of this local crisis. Our commitment to living simply opened our eyes to the lived reality of our neighbors near and far and brought our attention to ideas and discussions that helped to expand our learnings around justice.

Living simply is not about giving up everything or living with the least amount of things possible. Our simplicity challenge allowed us to add a limitation to our lived experience in order to be better connected to humanity, our planet, and ultimately our values and relationship with God. While living simply initially sounded like minimizing grocery spending and fulfilling just our needs and not indulging our wants, it is that and so much more. Living simply is living intentionally, and this requires fully understanding the consequences and repercussions of our actions. It is deliberately acknowledging how our actions impact our immediate and extended human family and our relationship with God’s creation.

For my community, this meant choosing to eat meat less often, and paying a higher price at the grocery store for more ethically and environmentally friendly raised meat. This was an intentional decision that involved us weighing our values and deciding how we could best make choices that reflected our beliefs and allowed us to feel in right relationship with creation and humanity. When we spend time researching meat free recipes each week, we know that it is not just to spend less money at the grocery store, but to truly live out our values. It is the connection of actions to live simply followed by reflection and conversations over why this matters that make our efforts bigger than simply living a couple nights without electricity.



**Sara honors Earth Day by serving
at Kirby Lane Park**

Living simply has allowed me to think deeply about how my choices and actions move me closer or farther from being the loving neighbor Jesus called me to be. It is empowering to think consciously about my actions and know that I am living intentionally as best I can instead of just conveniently or according to “what I’ve done before.” Seeing all of my time and choices as an opportunity to live out my values and faith has allowed me to not only feel more connected to my community, but also my faith and relationship with God.

God wonderfully made the world for us to live in harmony with each other and creation, and I can honor God each day through my intentional choices. As I prepare to have more personal responsibilities and choices upon leaving BSVM, this mindset of empowerment will continue to help ground me.



Mary Vatterott Hastings, MD

From a Parent's Perspective

Mary Vatterott Hastings, MD

Parents often play an important role in a prospective volunteer's discernment of a year of service. If their child chooses to say yes to service, parental support of and interest in their child's experience also impacts the service year. BSVM alum and current BSVM Volunteer Recruiter, Paula Hastings (BSVM '18-'19) is blessed to have strong parental support for her choice to dedicate a year of her life to service.

When Paula's mother, Mary Vatterott Hastings, was asked how she saw her daughter grow during Paula's time with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, she had much to say. As a parent of several children who committed to serve during their gap year and as physician who has worked in academic medicine, Mary offers insight and a unique perspective on the benefits of serving with BSVM.

How did you see your daughter grow during her time with BSVM?

I saw my daughter grow in her faith during her time with BSVM. The curriculum prepared her externally for a life of service while strengthening her inner life and jumpstarting her faith journey. She grew in compassion and understanding as she walked with those who are marginalized and heard their stories. These opportunities for empathy are a tremendous asset for young adults to experience no matter which professional path they choose. Paula grew in her appreciation and practice of doing things with intention. Her choices to live simply and nurture her prayer life are an example to the rest of us. She has enhanced her communication skills, especially those surrounding difficult conversations. These will serve her professional life and her future personal relationships.

Were you concerned about Paula not getting a 'real job' after graduation? How were those concerns allayed?

Our life job is to grow into good human beings and to be exposed to areas outside of our sphere. Time with BSVM does just that. It will enhance who your child is in a positive way for the rest of their life.

Paula did a long and thoughtful discernment process before joining BSVM, so I trusted that she made the decision that was right for her. As the current BSVM Volunteer Recruiter, I see her walking this discernment path with prospective applicants to make sure it is the best fit for all involved. If parents have concerns about their child delaying entrance into grad school, I'd tell them that time in service will help your child grow as an individual and have better insight into what will be the best direction for them in the future.

A year of service can also prepare your child to mature into a well-rounded adult. I was on the admission committee in my medical school and helped choose residents for several different Family Medicine residencies. We were able to see a higher level of focus and maturity in those who had done a service year. When there is a pool of applicants that are all very qualified, one must look for evidence of commitment and being well-rounded.



Mary and Paula outside the BSVM Volunteer House in Baltimore, MD

Continued on page 7



Paula at a BSVM Recruiting Event

Since you have had more than one child participate in service programs, what set BSVM apart from other programs?

My other children have also done service years after college. BSVM stands out in that it has an intentional approach toward community living in the setting of individual faith formation. Paula's BSVM community was more focused on interpersonal relationships and of being supportive of one another than other communities I had seen. I was impressed by her community members and witnessed the close bonds that they had formed. I was pleased to see their deep level of commitment to living together with intention. Her experience of community was much richer than a house where people

lived together while in college or while working a first job. She was also able to gain from her interactions with the Catholic Worker House located next door to the volunteer house.

What would you say to parents who may have reservations about their child doing a service year?

Trust your child. BSVM is steeped in helping your child follow the right path for him or her. I think your young adult is taking a very thoughtful and courageous choice. Trust that the Spirit is leading them where they need to be.



Sisters' Corner

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day with the Sisters

By Emily Thrush, Site Leader

With joy in our hearts and a spring in our step, the BSVM ministry volunteers joined a dozen sisters in March for a fun evening of conversation, games, and a corned-beef, cabbage, and potato feast. The volunteers gathered at the Retreat and Conference Center for the first time in person, and before they entered into their mid-year retreat with spaces for contemplation and silence, they enjoyed an evening to remember with the sisters.

Through an ice-breaker activity, we learned about songs that inspire us and bring us joy, and those we like to sing at full volume when no one is around. We even had a few brave people sing some verses of their favorite songs! The fun continued with several rounds of "Fishbowl," which combines elements of Taboo, Charades, and Password. After many months of virtual connections and screen time, we are so grateful for the chance to play games in person and to have the opportunity to get to know one another in close proximity. The staff at the Retreat Center ensured that we had a festive room to use and set up the technology so we could hear one another through our masks. It was a gift to meet with sisters who have worked so hard to support the ministry volunteers. We are hopeful for future gatherings when we can continue to build on the connections we've made thus far!



Sr. Nancy Glynn and Brion enjoy games at the RCC on St. Patrick's Day

A Note of Thanks to Our BSVM Alums

Serving Compassionately During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is a home for many ministry volunteers who move on to work in health care after their year of service, following the legacy of the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours. With so many BSVM alums in the field, serving in a variety of settings, we asked them to share their experiences of service during the pandemic. We are grateful for the responses we received and for their continued dedication to the charism of compassion, healing, and liberation. To all alums working on the frontlines and to those serving in any way, during COVID-19, we say thank you!



Joe Ann Murphy, RN, Former Site Supervisor,
and Danielle Madison Warren

Danielle Madison Warren (BSVM '06-'07)

Grace Medical Center, Baltimore, MD

I am an Emergency Physician and have been working with COVID-19 patients on a daily basis for the last year. I have also been serving on a nation-wide task force of Emergency Medicine physicians. Our goal is to share updates in PPE and treatment protocols and to improve the quality of care for patients as new research and information are continuously being published. My career has come full circle as in February of 2021 I took a new position at Grace Medical Center and am excited to be serving the population of West Baltimore again!

Crystal Truong (BSVM '08-'09)

Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Landstuhl, Germany

As an Internal Medicine clinic doctor, I rotate through and take care of patients on our dedicated inpatient COVID-19 unit, as well as provide follow-up after discharge. In our Outpatient Primary Care clinic, we were able to transition to mainly virtual appointments. Since receiving our vaccine doses at the beginning of the new year, we have been able to slowly schedule more routine in-person office visits.



Crystal getting her COVID-19 vaccine



Nadya Alboschy

Nadya Alboschy (BSVM '09-'10)

University of Maryland Medical Center, Baltimore, MD

As an ICU nurse on the COVID-19 frontline, there have been physical, mental, and emotional challenges for which I could never have been prepared. In the early months of the pandemic, the incredibly strong support shown across the board from hospital workers and the community was overwhelming. It's often what kept us going through the twelve-plus hour shifts. There continue to be many moments that we, as nurses, share and talk about as we work alongside one another. We share about the fear and unknown, the risks we are taking and possibly bringing home to our loved ones, the difficult decisions that had to be made, and the patients we can't forget. It is a way for us to vent, reflect, and look forward to better times. I am so incredibly thankful for all of the frontline workers who have fought and who continue to keep us safe.

Continued on page 9



Meghan Krueger

Meghan Krueger (BSVM '14-'15)

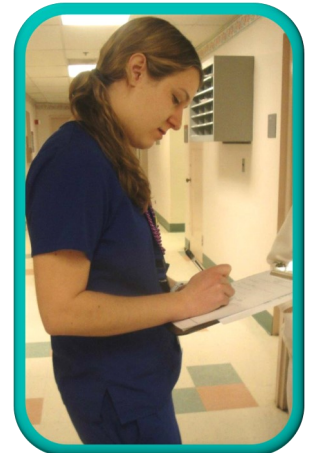
Boston Healthcare for the Homeless, Boston, MA

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I am grateful to be working for Boston Healthcare for the Homeless. There has been great fluctuation in my role over the last year. This has included staffing our temporary isolation and quarantine spaces for patients who are waiting for test results for COVID-19 or who had been exposed to COVID-19, and writing policies and conducting infection control trainings for staff as we prepared to reopen services after the first wave of the pandemic. Most recently, I have been honored to be a part of our program's vaccination efforts for our staff, our shelter partner staff and guests, as well as our patients who are eligible for vaccination. The hopefulness that I feel amidst our current vaccination efforts has been incredibly energizing.

Julie McCracken (BSVM '12-'13)

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

I'm a full-time PA in Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins. For the most part my position has remained the same, although we transitioned to telemedicine and focused on more urgent surgeries (e.g. spine cancer and emergency cases). In May of 2020, I was redeployed to a COVID-19 step-down unit for 6 weeks. More recently, I've helped with vaccine administration both through Johns Hopkins and the Baltimore City Health Department.



Julie McCracken

Chris Dethlefs (BSVM '18-'19)

University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE

Chris and fellow students from the University of Nebraska Medical Center helped maintain and harvest a local community garden in Omaha. Fresh produce from the garden was delivered weekly to a food pantry at a local community health center during the pandemic.



Chris Dethlefs and fellow students from University of Nebraska Medical Center

A Note of Thanks to Our BSVM Alums
Continued from page 9



Maggie Rybak

Maggie Rybak (BSVM '18-'19)

Case Western University, Cleveland, OH

Since July of 2020, I have been a contact tracer with the Ohio Department of Health. We help the county health departments throughout the state handle surges. On a day to day basis, I complete interviews with Ohioans to collect data, prevent further spread, and help support those who are sick or isolated. My work is mostly about being a compassionate presence with a dash of epidemiology. I get to hear about peoples' real experiences with COVID-19 each day, and sometimes be one of the few people they talk to during their time in isolation.

Abbi Cerezo (BSVM '16-'17)

Boston Medical Center, Boston, MA

As a fourth-year medical student, my favorite part of working in the hospital was sitting with patients, helping them feel more at home during their stressful hospital stay, and sharing stories with them. COVID-19 obviously changed the way we worked with patients. Everyone had to be in gowns, gloves, face shields, and double-masked before entering a patient room. Initially, we were told to stay in the rooms for as little time as possible. As the pandemic went on, I started having end-of-life conversations with patients. I wanted to make sure that patients and their families had a sense of closure and connectedness, even if they couldn't all be together in the hospital. With all of my personal protective equipment on, I made sure to hold hands with my patients and ensure they could see my eyes. I gave my personal cell phone number and Zoom link out to families so we could chat on my time off. It was important that families knew who was taking care of their loved ones and that patients could see their families over Zoom. These experiences were definitely hard. I shared tears with people and my heart broke. At the same time, I helped bridge people together during such a horrible time. One of the lessons I learned from COVID-19 was that in difficult times we need to reach out and remember our humanity because fear will try and take that away from us. It was an incredible privilege to be there supporting my patients during these unprecedented times.



Abbi Cerezo

BSVM Community Life - Spring 2021



Emily, BSVM Site Leader, and Destiny honor Earth Day by serving at Boushall Middle School in Richmond, VA



Mikayla enjoys the spring azaleas at the Joseph Bryan Park



Kelly enjoys some creative art activities during the recent contemplative retreat



Brion makes gluten free soda bread for his community



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

Cover Photo

2020-2021 BSVM Volunteers at the Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center. Photo taken by Paula Hastings, BSVM Recruiter.

BSVM Staff

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

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 BSVM

Share your time and enthusiasm. Your personal presence is one of the best ways to support the program. Send a letter of support, or schedule a time to visit our community outside or over Zoom. Contact BSVMoffice@bshsi.org.

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

BY MAIL Make checks payable to
Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
& mail to:

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

BY VENMO @bonsecoursvolunteer

BY PAYPAL **Visit our website:**
bonsecours.us/volunteers/donate/
& click the **Donate** button