



Living Simply: Diving Deep



By Ally Staresinic | 2021 - 2022 Volunteer | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

One of our pillars this year was living simply. While living simply does have to do with finances and your lifestyle, for me, living simply ended up really being about having the ability to make intentional choices about how you spend your time. Rather than limit you, it is intended to give you a broader scope to focus on or rediscover what really matters to you or recharges you, which then keeps each of us engaged individually and communally. Prior to this year, my housemates and I were involved in very busy schedules either in college or the working world. While these schedules were for the most part fulfilling, the fullness meant we often did not have breathing room to explore new practices, routines, or reflect on our current ones. Living simply this year has given us the chance to engage in practices that renew us and connect us to the broader community.

In terms of our finances, we do live on a budget that has made us more intentional in how we spend our money and time. This has given us the opportunity to both discover new habits and routines and focus on choices that matter the most for us. For example, Mario had a budgeting sheet from the year prior that he shared with us. I now have a new love for spreadsheets and finding ways to tinker around with the formulas on my budget and have found some peace in updating it every week or so. We have also found free festivals and community events throughout the year, which have enhanced our ability to connect with the community at large.

In terms of our routines, each of us found individual practices this year with our extra time that have filled us up and allowed us to reach back out to others. Mario discovered a passion for baking bread. Throughout the year he

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Editor's Perch

By Emily Thrush | BSVM Site Leader

"There is nothing more essential, vital, and important than love and its carrier—tenderness—practiced in the present moment. By keeping it close, just right now, we are reminded to choose connection over alienation, kinship over self-absorption. We need only meet the world, today, with a loving heart, to determine what we will find. A loving heart doesn't color your world like rose-colored glasses; it alters it. William James wrote, 'The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.'" (from *Barking to the Choir* by Gregory Boyle, SJ)

This issue arrives in your hands during a sacred time of breath between our cohorts of Ministry Volunteers. As we look back at the close of the 2021-2022 service year and anticipate the beginning of the next year of transformation and spiritual formation, we use this present moment to hear reflections from Ally and Caroline about two pillars that shaped significant portions of their year – living simply and practicing God's justice. Both volunteers reflect on the way their practices helped them engage relationally, choosing what Fr. Greg Boyle calls "connection over alienation." The practices that we try and apply throughout a BSVM year help us meet the world and one another "with a loving heart," connecting our inward life with our outward actions. These practices help us become 'tough Christians,' as our Director, Shannon Curran charged during the Closing Service, and help us choose love in the face of difficult news cycles and examples of violence, hostility, and hatred. Instead of shutting down, we show up with tenderness, affirming our kinship that helps us recognize we belong to one another, and our loving hearts help us pivot to actions that encourage compassion, healing, and liberation as we dive deeply into our immediate spheres of proximity.



Emily Thrush , BSVM Site Leader, and the BSVM 2021-2022 Volunteers

We also want to take the present moment to share our gratitude for the gift of those who have walked with our ministry over the years. We hear from parents of an alum and what helped them support his decision to do something different after his college experience. We share from our Closing Service that helped cap the 2021-2022 service year, and we honor Joy Aker for hitting her 15th year milestone of leading our BSVM retreats. Our broader community of BSVM friends (comprised of alumni, families, colleagues, Sisters, staff, and incoming volunteers) create a web of support that is crucial to our practice of keeping tender love central to how we engage our present moment. Wherever you find yourself, may you move with intention towards a posture of love that flows with grace, creativity, spaciousness, and joy.

has perfected his sourdough recipe, which certainly has brought a lot of joy to us and to the lucky external individuals he has shared his bread with. Caroline similarly loves cooking and has been the best at thinking up new recipes for us to try, and I am amazed at what she can come up with when we just have some random ingredients in the kitchen. She helped us to have a fantastic Thanksgiving, and usually has put together the food for big community events such as our Site Supervisor Retreat Day or events with her students at school. Patrick has continued to play his saxophone and also joined the choir at our church this year, bringing us more joy with his singing and sax solos at church. As a community, we have made it part of our weekly routine to walk to two nearby parks. These walks are very intentional time spent with each other and engaging with our surroundings. Every time we go, we notice something new or different, and we have met some very cute cats and dogs along the way! It has become a habit that lets us stay in tune with the neighborhood and each other, and the city views at each park certainly make it worth the trip as well.



Ally serves patients and staff in her volunteer role in the Behavioral Health Unit at the Richmond Community Hospital

With the larger amount of time available to me this year, the idea of swimming started to come back to me. I was looking for a way to process my experiences at my service site and wanted to do the prayer and meditation encouraged by the Volunteer Ministry, but I was having a hard time finding a way to do this. Any sort of sitting reflection left me feeling antsy and I was often too mentally tired for written reflection. When Patrick and I began looking into a gym membership this winter, swimming came back into the picture as a way for me to meditate and move.

I have always loved the water, and many of my favorite places to sit are by a lake or similar body of water. Since starting to swim, I have really appreciated how the pillar of living simply has brought something that brings me joy back into my life. I was a swimmer in high school but quit my senior year as I could no longer balance the time commitment and emotional demands of the team. Beyond my job as a lifeguard, for the next five years, I barely got back into the water. Now that I am swimming again, it has brought me so much peace to incorporate movement, water, and my thoughts into one activity. When I am in the pool, it is just me and the black line at the bottom, and I alternate between focusing on my strokes and breathing or letting my mind wander and sort out events from the day, conversations with God, and reflections on the year. It has been nice to simply enjoy the swimming itself as well. In high school, I swam for about two hours a day in a lane full of other people and a demanding coach on deck. While all of that was beneficial at the time, it no longer is necessary for my life today. It feels very freeing to be able to swim by myself, for as long as I want, and to focus on whatever I want to get out of the pool without having to worry about any competitions. The ability to process and meditate helps relax me and in turn makes me a better person for my ministry site on the Behavioral Health Unit and my community at home. I am grateful that living simply allowed me to rediscover an activity that brings me such joy and in turn helps me to be a better community member.

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At our winter retreat, one of our activities was to design something out of clay that represented us and our journey through this year. I created a dolphin because of my love of water and my ability to dive deeply and submerge myself into this year to learn and experience as much as I can. I think the emphasis on simple living has given all of us the chance to be dolphins and really dive into our service sites, our Richmond community, and our BSVM community as our full and present selves. I know for me it has been a two-fold experience both in terms of the larger service year and my time in the pool. It is a simple way for me to dive deeper in my mind while still moving and sort out what I am learning from and growing in each time I am in the water. I am grateful that the intentionally slower pace of life has given me the opportunity to rediscover an activity that is good for my body, mind, and spirit. I think that rediscovery is a true embodiment of what it means to live out the pillar of living simply.



Ally creates a dolphin out of clay to represent her love for the water & her ability to dive deeply into her service site

Living simply for us this year has meant the gift to make choices about what matters on how we spend our resources whether it be money, energy, or time. I think it has allowed all of us this year to dial in on things that replenish us and keep us engaged individually and communally.

DO YOU KNOW A YOUNG ADULT WHO IS R.E.A.D.Y. FOR A YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION?

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- **Eager** to build relationships
- **Able** to live simply
- **Dedicated** to spiritual growth
- **Yearning** to grow through service with others

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Pivoting Towards Justice



By Caroline Kirk | 2021 - 2022 Volunteer | A graduate of the University of Virginia

“Without vision, the people perish.” These are the words Bon Secours Sister, Fran Gorsuch, quoted in her opening remarks to our new cohort of Ministry Volunteers, back in August. “Put your beliefs to practice,” said Professor Ashon Crawley of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. “We have to decide who we want to be in the world,” said Larycia Hawkins, an activist, mentor, and professor of mine. Words and phrases like these, from mentors and contemporary prophets that have entered my life over the last few years, repeat in my mind, helped to lead me to BSVM, and propel me towards seeking a life focused on practicing God’s justice.

While these words have become routine mantras for me, it was not until listening to a podcast recently on reimagining justice and reimagining ourselves that I realized these statements speak to an undervalued and sometimes surprising theory of justice. Each of my mentors’ remarks turn on the claim that justice begins from within the individual person. Deciding who we want to be, having vision, and putting internalized beliefs to practice, all begin with the individual. The way we talk about practicing God’s justice in the Volunteer Ministry is quite similar. Our relationship with ourselves, God, and others should be aimed at creating a more whole and healed world and practicing a divine kind of love that affirms individuality, dignity, and equality. An interview with Shawn Ginwright, an African American social scientist, leader, and movement builder, helped to put words to the ways the contemplative and active sides of the Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry work together and urge us to practice a reflective, and possibly more sustaining, type of justice.

There are hierarchies of human value—artificially placing some on the top of society and others on the bottom—within every dimension of life. Not only does this warp our vision of humanity, but it affects our policies, distribution of resources, and opportunities to grow and succeed. The false hierarchy gives some people safe and affordable housing and leaves others without, provides access to health care in proportion to wealth, creates disparities in education, and has made some neighborhoods food deserts and gifted other neighborhoods with abundance. Ginwright makes the provocative claim that if we do not first turn inward, we will not be prepared to create justice outwardly. Our year of service presents us with an opportunity to enter into, or at least see more clearly, each of these spheres of injustice. Learning through service with and living in proximity to historically marginalized populations allows us to simultaneously see *and feel* more. It is the feeling more, or as we often talk about from the Bon Secours charism, sharing in compassion, that inspires us to first turn inward.

In sharing examples from my time in Richmond, I hope to depict the way my year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has allowed me to practice God’s justice and Ginwright’s “Four Pivots.” He claims that to reimagine justice, we have to turn inward and



Caroline meets with a Cristo Rey Richmond High School student at her ministry site

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Caroline meets with a handful of students for an afterschool women's empowerment group called, Cristo Reinas

shift our awareness, connection, vision, and presence. Shifting in such a way ultimately helps us to affirm our own belovedness as children of God and the belovedness of every individual (and element of God's creation) we come into relationship with, which is essential in God's vision of justice. This is the precursor for turning outward but not the only change necessary. I can only pray that we continue to pivot towards justice, pivot towards a full-body understanding of belovedness, and therefore pivot towards destroying the hierarchy of human value that plagues us today. Humbly, I will try to paint the picture of this connection and reflect on the ways in which this year has helped me begin this lifelong justice journey.

While serving each day and participating in our volunteer formation has given me a lens to understand the way

systemic and historical disenfranchisement and racism insidiously affect our health care and education systems, it has also prompted me to reflect on how these injustices have impacted my life. Ginwright believes the first pivot we need to make is shifting our awareness from a lens to a mirror. The work of justice requires more than just an understanding of the issues. We must employ a self-reflective attitude where we each stake a claim in the work of making things right by understanding how our world and life are inextricably intertwined with the realities of injustice - where things are broken and not right.

Deeper reflection work leads us to accountability and advocacy. Accountability and advocacy also happen to be two core values we hold at Cristo Rey Richmond High School—my service placement and where I learn—and practicing these values requires more than just getting to know students. Feeling some solidarity with students outside of school enriches our justice work. I had a student tell me bluntly: “But only a rich person would do that,” when talking about my year of service. That becomes a necessary mirror to consider my own place in society; this time serving Richmond's East End is not just presenting me with a lens to see injustice, but checking my role in the system of injustice. A year like this, living next door to students and riding the bus alongside them, forces me to reckon with the fact that I am higher on the unequal hierarchy of human value when it comes to power, resources, and opportunities I have been given. Even when I wake up an extra hour earlier to take the bus at 7:15 a.m. with students, it is a choice. I could choose to take the BSVM van and leave later. Beyond that, when I finish the service day at 5 p.m.—the same time students end after school activities—I go home to take a walk and eat dinner, while most students go to another job from 6-11 p.m. virtually every weeknight. A mirror awareness does not just let me see the difficulty they face, but also pushes me to see the ease I am privileged with.

Ginwright asks us also to pivot our connection with others from feeling transactional to building transformational relationships. This is justice work that explicitly acknowledges the belovedness of a human being. And it is justice work that each member of our volunteer community has the daily opportunity to practice. Whether justice looks like Ally building a relationship with one patient who still writes to her from a nursing home, Patrick growing more and more comfortable with a patient who talks less and less, Mario spending every Wednesday with the same group of four students, or the women's empowerment group that I envisioned everyone wanting to attend but which maintains only a few core members, building transformational relationships is about holding steadfast and embracing the humanity we encounter as a gift.

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The third pivot is one that I believe is imperative to the academic space I have been serving in this year. Ginwright encourages us to pivot our vision from problem solving to possibility creating. I have been able to see this first-hand while substitute teaching for a 10th grade English class, shifting my vision from trouble shooting when a group of students is off task, to leaning in to where their energy is already and creating a possibility in the classroom out of that. This type of justice work creates a space for individual freedom to flourish and belovedness to slowly become internalized through actions that say to a student, “Yes, your energy is beautiful and we can use it to learn in this new way. Yes, you are enough just as you are in this class. Yes, your individuality and freedom are important.”

Finally, Ginwright claims that to practice justice we need to shift our presence from hustle to flow. Rather than live a life on autopilot, of instantaneous consumption and infinite tasks, we are called to slow down—not so we have to do less, but so that we can go deeper. This connects directly with practicing God’s justice as well: slowing down this year, including daily prayer practices and practicing a weekly Sabbath, has given us the freedom to be creative, imagine a more just day-to-day for our neighbors, and relish in relationships. For our volunteer community, slowing down has drawn us into communion with God’s creation through our enjoyment of the outdoors and has prompted us to take justice for the environment more seriously. For our volunteer house, giving up meat during Lent, intentionally composting our food scraps, and tending to our own garden has been a result of slowing down and has required us to continue to pause when we make grocery lists, are offered food at work, or are about to throw an old onion in the trash. Deeper work like this can be both internal—noticing what autopilot looks like for us and deciding what deserves more intention and change—or it can be external—diving deeper into a community group by taking the time to listen to and share individual stories before getting down to business.

To put our beliefs into practice, to immerse ourselves in any of these pivots, we have to be open to the work they can do within and around us. As I come to the close of my time as a Ministry Volunteer, I see that I have been gifted the space to work toward this type of inward and outward justice. Slowly, these pivots undermine the broken hierarchy of human value that both systems and individuals perpetuate, and I believe, in turn, lead us into belovedness. Tuning into and tapping into our own belovedness also gives us a sustaining chance at justice work. The realities of injustice we have faced in Richmond, and every community in our nation faces, are hard, draining, and can feel hopeless. Practicing God’s justice in a contemplative and active way, however, makes consistency more possible. When we look inward, rest, pray, read, listen, and learn, we prepare to turn outward, take action, speak out, write, engage, and teach.

I am energized by the way I see practicing God’s justice and Ginwright’s four pivots overlap in my life right now. Practicing God’s justice is working toward pivoting our awareness, connection, vision, and presence, doing so with love, and being a champion of beloved humanity. Starting with ourselves is only the beginning, but it is the necessary start if we are going to transform our institutions, policies, structures, and power. If we don’t stop, we cannot pivot. Everyone has an opportunity to stop, and my time in the Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has been a beautiful stop, indeed.



Caroline and her housemates help at Legacy Farms in the Church Hill neighborhood



Celebrating our 2021-2022 Ministry Volunteers

By Shannon Curran | B SVM Director

This reflection was delivered at our Closing Liturgy to begin the service and thank the volunteers.

Thank you for joining us this morning as we honor our 2021-2022 community of volunteers.

Our first reading today is from chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome. With great care and detail, Paul describes the depths of Christ's love and how nothing, absolutely nothing --- even those forces of evil and injustice at work that we can't see --- those principalities and powers --- cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ.

That's really hard to believe. Humans have a hard time truly believing that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Paul is writing to believers in the heart of the Empire. I mean, these were tough Christians to be "in it" surrounded by evil at work, but hanging onto hope and faith in Christ. Sound familiar?

Our news is a daily onslaught. We are surrounded by the misuse of power, by hate, by dishonesty, by worshipping weapons and violence, and now by protecting life up until birth, but not after. It can be hard to believe that these forces --- these principalities and powers ---are not stronger than God's love. Until. Until we let ourselves truly receive and feel God's love.

Often, this happens in service and in community - dynamics that are the opposite of or opposed to Empire. When we practice a consistent ministry of presence whether through service, community, or with creation, we uncover God's love in Christ in surprising ways.

Volunteers, we've witnessed you be encountered by Christ's love in the act of service and in the life of community within your home, within your neighborhood, and within your ministry placement sites. We've seen how practicing and receiving presence on the margin has gifted you with, as Greg Boyle and Pedro Arrupe write, a new view.

It's been an honor to hear you receive and feel God's love in Christ each in your own unique ways. Whether it's been through baking bread, rediscovering a love of swimming, feeling drawn to love and be loved by your students or patients, or growing in love of yourself as a gifted child of God, it's been an honor for us to accompany you in receiving God's love. You've stretched yourselves to live in and come to love a city and neighborhood that were new to you. You've learned to not just live with new people, but how to love each other in community. You've learned that service is not about doing but about being with and, in turn, coming closer to being your true self.

When we do receive and feel God's love in Christ, we start to get a sense of the power and strength of God's love. That new view that comes from practicing and receiving presence on the margin helps us recognize Empire at work and name those principalities and powers at work. God's love in Christ gives us the strength to recognize and choose power-with not power-over, love not hate, truth not lies, and truly choose all of life and all lives not weapons, violence, and death.

Volunteers, today we celebrate you, because just like those Paul wrote to in that little community in Rome, you are tough Christians. We thank you for sharing your journey with us and magnifying the strength of God's love. It is this very strength and power of God's love that fuels our belief that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ and therefore, gives us the strength to hang onto hope and believe that another way is possible.

Thank you volunteers and thank you Fr. Joe for leading our celebration of these tough Christians.



Fr. Joe Muth presides at liturgy



Congregation blesses volunteers



Patrick & Mario share their musical talents

Sisters' Corner

Saying Goodbye and Blessing the Volunteers

By Emily Thrush | B SVM Site Leader



Sr. Elaine Davia, Sisters of Bon Secours, USA—Area Leader, blesses the B SVM 2021-2022 Volunteers

“O God, send your Spirit to guide Caroline, Patrick, Ally, and Mario to continue to see, hear, and feel your presence in service with others. May God’s Spirit and Hope be with each of you as you continue to proclaim God’s justice through centering the relationships of your life in service. Amen.”

These words accompanied a community blessing at the end of our Closing Service for our outgoing ’21-’22 Ministry Volunteers in Marriottsville this summer. Sr. Elaine led the Sisters in giving a B SVM blessing that bookended the Commissioning Liturgy last September.

During the Closing Service, our Volunteers played piano and mandolin, brought the gifts, and shared some readings before the Sisters blessed them for their time of service.

After Mass, we gathered on the Priest’s Porch and heard the closing reflections from the Ministry Volunteers who shared snapshots of lessons they learned and stories that helped to shape their year of transformation. Those in attendance bore witness to these young women and men who have been inspired by, invested in, and accompanied to live out the Bon Secours charism in their communal and individual journeys.



Sr. Chris Webb & Shannon Curran, B SVM Director, listen to the reflections shared by the Volunteers that illustrated their personal spiritual transformation through service with others.



Sr. Chris Webb enjoyed celebrating with the Volunteers following their reflections

We are grateful for the Sisters of Bon Secours and all our colleagues, friends, and alumni who have supported this outgoing group of Volunteers, and who continue to care for each new cohort of Volunteers through prayer and presence. We are looking forward to all the ways that God will move in the upcoming months!

Friend of BSVM: Parents of Ministry Volunteer

By Michael & Kathy Wood | Reflection on son's BSVM year (Christian Wood, BSVM 2018-2019)



Michael and Kathy Wood with their son, Christian, at his white coat ceremony

“I would like to take a gap year,” were words that frankly raised a small amount of concern for my wife and me as we wondered how this would impact our son’s ability to get into medical school, given he had worked so hard through his four years of college at Notre Dame. But when Christian sat down with us and passionately explained the service opportunity at Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, and the work he would be doing to both immerse himself within and serve the Baltimore Community, we quickly came to realize this was exactly what he needed to do. There are certain things you can’t learn from a book, a lecture, or a lab, but you must experience in life, and within the BVSM program, Christian was given the unique opportunity to live daily within the intersection of his faith, his pursuit of medicine, and his desire to serve those in need.

The house that he stayed in was sparse and situated well within the community he served, and within five minutes of meeting the housemates he would be sharing it with, we knew he had found himself a home. He told us many stories of how they shopped, prayed, and lived simply as a family, and he developed deep friendships that he will carry with him for life. And yes, he even learned how to cook dinner

for a family of five! He discussed with us the opportunities he had to have lunch and spend time with the CEO of the local hospital he worked within, knowing how rare that level of access truly was, while also being equally moved and humbled by spending time on the hospital floor speaking to and comforting patients who often had no one else in their lives to speak with during their difficult ordeal.

Through his time with BVSM, Christian learned not only what it means to be in service with the community but more importantly, why his service is so desperately needed. After being tired and slightly worn out by college, we saw him become fully re-energized and excited to move onto his next chapter of his education. Upon completion of his time with BVSM, Christian was accepted into the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is now just finishing his third year. I know how much he cherished his time with BVSM, the memories he made, and the friendships that he gained, and that he’ll take that experience with him through the rest of his life.



Christian with his BSVM 2018-2019 Community along with Shannon Curran, BSVM Director

Thank you, Joy Aker!

Celebrating 15 years as our BSVM Retreat Leader

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BSVM wouldn't be who we are without the presence, guidance, and facilitation of Joy Aker in our BSVM retreats for the past 15 years.

Steeped in Ignatian spirituality and gifted in introducing our volunteers to many kinds of spiritual practices, Joy has walked with 15 different cohorts of volunteers, and begins her 16th cohort in the fall.

We are grateful for her years of commitment and honor all the innumerable ways she has touched the lives and hearts of scores of Ministry Volunteers. Joy has been known to say, "They keep me young!"

Thank you for sharing your full self with us, Joy, and for encouraging each volunteer to explore their own unique expression of God's love!

Thank you!



Joy with the BSVM 2018-2019 Volunteers



Zoom retreat with Joy and BSVM 2019-2020 Volunteers



Joy with the BSVM 2016-2017 Volunteers



Emily and Joy with the BSVM 2020-2021 Volunteers



Joy leads prayer for the BSVM 2017-2018 Volunteers



Joy with the BSVM 2021-2022 Volunteers



Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

1525 Marriottsville Road,
Marriottsville, MD 21104

Cover Photo

The Sisters of Bon Secours, USA, with the B SVM 2021-2022 Volunteers following their Closing Ceremony. Photo Credit: Liz O'Neill, Director of Communication

BSVM Staff

Shannon Curran, *Director*

Emily Thrush, *Site Leader*

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 B SVM

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:

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