



## Meet our 2022-2023 Ministry Volunteers!

*BSVM is thrilled to introduce you to our current Ministry Volunteers and to let them share some of what drew them to a year of service and spiritual formation after college, and what helped them commit to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry specifically. You'll also hear them share a hope they have for one of our program pillars, which are integrated and deepened throughout the year.*



**Julianne Esteves** | A graduate of the College of the Holy Cross  
Placement: Richmond Community Hospital – Emergency Department

Some of the most meaningful moments during my time at the College of the Holy Cross arose on spring break immersions, in classes centered around community-based learning, and throughout prayer on retreats I took. These short-term experiences motivated me to commit to a whole year after college that provided more opportunities for growth in community-building and my faith. I was drawn to BSVM specifically because of its role in providing compassionate healthcare to those who are too often denied equitable access. One day, I hope to combine my interest in medicine with my goal to work for justice in the broken healthcare system; I found BSVM to be a great model for me and my aspirations.

I also wanted to immerse myself in a new city after college, away from my home in New York, and I appreciated how much the BSVM volunteers engage with the Baltimore and Richmond communities. I am so excited to be a part of the Emergency Department team at Richmond Community Hospital and lend a helping hand and heart to the patients and staff. One goal I have for this year surrounding the pillar of growing spiritually is to be more open and patient to the ways in which God is lovingly present and working through me, my community, and the individuals I am serving.

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Meet our 2022-2023 Ministry Volunteers

**Axell Komlan** | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame  
Placement: Richmond Community Hospital – Spiritual Care Ministry

Ever since my youth, I was always drawn to the idea of service through accompaniment with others. Having been raised in the Christian faith tradition and instilled with the African “Ubuntu” philosophy (you are because I am, and I am because you are), I instinctively knew that my life’s purpose would consist of being of “good help” to those in physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual need. Moreover, having seen the detrimental effects of generational illnesses (on both sides of my family) and income inequality, I made it my life’s goal to enter medicine and address social factors that serve as critical determinants for health. At the center of these pursuits is a personal desire to assume the self-emptying nature of Christ Jesus, choosing to serve as opposed to being served.

As an aspiring physician, I plan to serve patients who hail from underserved communities. Yet, as a recent college graduate, I can attest to the way in which privileged academic circles and spaces can shield students from the harsh socioeconomic conditions and concerns of low-income populations (both in the United States and around the world). In other words, college can act as a bubble that can prevent us from understanding what it means to be poor. Thus, throughout my discernment about doing a year of service, it was not enough for me to merely virtue signal my support for the marginalized; rather, it was (and is) a priority for me to understand what it is like to live on limited means and to live in the heart of the community that I would have the privilege of serving each and every day. In the vein of Christ Jesus, I wanted to draw closer to the pains, burdens, and struggles of my brothers and sisters, learning from them as effectively my own.



Volunteers participate in teambuilding activities during their orientation

By the grace of God, I stumbled onto the Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry program by accident after receiving a random follow request on Instagram! Although I was initially inclined to reject the request (believing it to be the work of an Instagram bot), a small voice inside of me (most likely the Holy Spirit) insisted that I visit the page before disregarding it altogether. Little did I know at the time that God pointed me to the service program that I had been praying for.

I joined Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry because I was drawn to the charm of the Sisters of Bon Secours Congregation: experiencing God’s compassion, liberation, and healing with the poor, sick, and dying. Not only am I interested in learning about the intersections between spirituality, social justice, and medicine, but I am also interested in seeing the face of God through the lives of my housemates, the patients who I will encounter, and members of the surrounding community. As such, one pillar of the program that I look forward to exploring in depth is growing spiritually. On one hand, I hope to use my time in BSVM to deepen my personal relationship with Christ Jesus and become more attentive to His voice through the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, I hope to learn about how to put my faith in action and utilize it in service of others. I anticipate using the Word of God, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Preferential Option for the Poor as my foundation for integrating faith and justice. One particular insight that I wish to unpack throughout the year is that the poor and marginalized are blessed sacraments of God’s grace (in other words, they are visible signs of God’s invisible grace). I look forward to being a “disciple” of my neighbors in the East End of Richmond, with them offering and teaching me more than anything that I could ever offer or teach them.

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**Armel Mignondje** | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame  
Placement: Richmond Community Hospital – Behavioral Health Unit

One thing that drew me to a year of service was the idea of being able to meet Jesus in the people I would meet. I had always heard about this idea of Jesus identifying himself with the poor, and although I had been involved in service before, I had never immersed myself within it, living side by side with those with whom I was serving. I wanted an experience of immersion because I thought it would help me prioritize and value more meaningful parts of life, stripping away a lot of the voices of society that lead me away from God.

In the end, what helped me commit to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry were the conversations I had with current and previous volunteers along with my own reflection. Talking with them, I found similarities between our experiences and some of the things we wanted to explore during a year of service with Bon Secours, especially health-related things. I also learned about how a year with Bon Secours impacted a previous volunteer. She described her spiritual growth and how she learned to discern how God was speaking to her through her experiences, which led to discovering her vocation. After reflecting and considering what I wanted, I felt a sense of peace with committing to Bon Secours. I thought I would get the most growth and clarity here compared to other paths. Because of this, one hope I have around the pillar of growing spiritually is learning to hear and surrender to the voice of God throughout the year, following God's plan for my life.



**Anna Quast** | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame  
Placement: Bon Secours Hospice and Palliative Care

In college, I never really had a clear path ahead for what I wanted to do after graduation. I had considered grad school, full-time positions, and pretty much all one could do post-grad. A year of service had always been something I knew was an option, but it never became my first choice until senior year. The summer between junior and senior years, I participated in the Summer Service Learning Program through Notre Dame—an eight week service immersion that focused on Catholic Social Teaching and learning with others through service. I was beyond blessed to be welcomed into the L'Arche community of people with and without intellectual disabilities in Greater Washington, DC, where I was able to experience the beauty in daily life, living in community, and mutually transformative relationships. After that summer, I realized that I was called to be more intentional about how I learn and grow after senior year. While it is awesome that others want to pursue further education in the traditional sense, I knew that further schooling was not what I was looking for yet. Thus, a year of service with BSVM caught my attention as a program where I can continue my education but in a different way!



Volunteers enjoy movie night at Sarah Garland Jones Center

The BSVM pillars of living simply, developing community, learning through service with others, growing spiritually, and practicing God's justice stood out to me when I was faced with the multitude of service year programs. I was also drawn to BSVM because of the numerous levels of support it offers—from the Sisters of Bon Secours, BSVM staff, site supervisors, community members, and the BSVM alumni network. Having numerous individuals to support me through this year of growth has already proven to be a great blessing, and I'm only one month into the year! I am beyond excited to be here in Richmond, and I look forward to developing relationships at home, in my neighborhood, at my site, and in the greater Richmond area. In reflecting on the BSVM pillar of developing community, I hope that the communities I find here in Richmond become the people and places in which I experience God's grace and loving presence.

# A Deeper Kind of Presence



By Patrick Kollman | BSVM 2021-2022  
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

## *How have you been transformed through service with others?*

It's *really* hard to sum up what I learned this past year through my service placement at Richmond Community Hospital. Starting off with very limited experience in hospitals, I felt like I began as an information sponge, soaking in new details every day about how the ER works, what commonly brings people to Richmond Community Hospital (RCH), how we as a system take care of or fail to take care of people with different physical or mental illnesses, what resources are and aren't available to people experiencing poverty,

what end-of-life care looks like for those with little by the way of family or friends, and a whole lot more. In a very demonstrable way, I learned a ton of incredibly valuable information about how hospital units run and how they interact with other social support systems in serving neglected communities.

More important than that, the most unique thing about this year and position in the hospital is that I was given the opportunity to just *be* there, with no agenda other than show support and compassion to patients and staff, both in physically helping out however I can and providing a listening ear. Ultimately, I think the most important way in which I grew this year was in discovering the profound power of listening.



Patrick served at Richmond Community Hospital—Emergency Department during his ministry year

Most of my teachers growing up would probably agree on one thing about me: listening wasn't my strong suit. I've always loved to talk, and I am used to listening with an objective in mind, which made one central aspect of my service position for me quite initially challenging: I didn't have much to say. The doctors and nurses communicate their diagnoses and treatment plans, physical therapy tells them exercise instructions, social workers can instruct them on navigating social institutions. I realized that often, all I had to say to them was

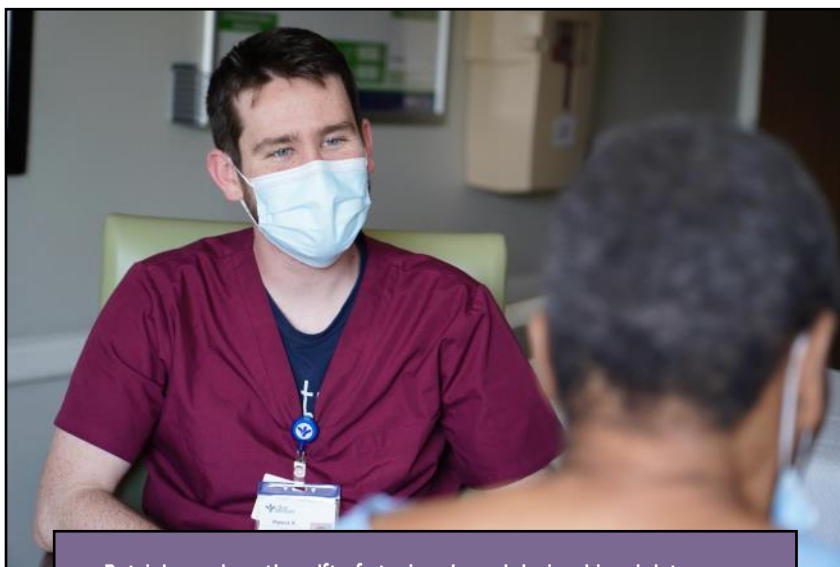
"Hello, I'm Patrick, and I can stay and visit for a bit if you'd like." While this initially challenged my talkative personality and desire to *do* rather than just *be*, I realized quickly how much many of our patients desperately wanted somebody to just listen. Often, upon a new admission, I would ask if the patient wanted a visitor, and they would immediately launch into their entire life story. While all other staff on the floor would have to cut them off to get to other tasks, I've had the privilege to just be there with them, with no hurry.

So many stories from the countless hours I've gotten to spend listening and chatting with the patients of RCH have stuck with me. Early on in



Patrick with one of his Site Supervisors, Markus Mines, Nurse Director—Richmond Community Hospital—Emergency Department

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Patrick receives the gift of stories shared during his ministry year

my time at RCH, nearly every day I would visit an extended stay patient I'll call Sarah, a woman on a six-week course of intravenous antibiotics who happened to suffer from addiction. She loved our walks around the hospital, and very clearly just needed somebody to tell her story and vent to. She came to trust me and was willing to talk on bad and good days alike. On one particularly bad day, she broke her meal tray in frustration, and security was called to ensure everyone's safety. Still crying and saying she wanted to leave but no longer a danger of violence, I asked her if she'd like to go for a walk. The nursing staff were skeptical that this was safe or advisable, but I assured them that I trusted her not to hurt me or herself, and we went. She slowly

calmed down as I listened and she told her side of the story, and I was able to convince her to have a bit more trust for the hospital staff as she heals. The trust I gained by listening to her without an objective or agenda was important in keeping her from leaving against medical advice. Even more so than I served her, her vulnerable sharing of her story through struggles of abuse and addiction served me, opening my heart to pain I'd never experienced and fostered a deep sense of admiration for the hope and perseverance she managed to have against the odds.

A story of 'Tim,' an extended-stay dementia patient also comes to mind. He had good and bad days when it came to remembering who I was (or thinking I was someone from his past life), but I loved to sit and be with him on either type of day. For Tim, the way to reach him was less so to listen, as he couldn't piece together more than a few sentences at a time, but more was to create a give-and-take that engaged his limited social self. His memory and ability to focus got drastically better over his stay at the hospital, and he came to remember and be excited by my presence nearly each day I visited. Towards the end of his stay, we wheeled down to the chapel where I said I'd play him a favorite song of his on the piano. About two seconds into "Don't Stop Believin'," he started to bawl. I asked if he'd like me to continue, and he said yes, and continued to cry as I played and poorly sang about a minute of the song. This had a sobering effect on him for the rest of the day, and while I'm sure he forgot it by the next day, it remains a powerful moment that resulted from my learning how to just *be* with the patients.

Of the countless things I've learned this year, it's a little fitting that the simplest one is the most powerful. This experience will always serve as a reminder that everyone wants to feel heard, and that I can choose to hear with an agenda, or I can choose to really listen, to seek understanding, and to compassionately bear witness to their beautiful complexity. This deeper kind of presence allowed each person's story to teach me something unique and powerful. Each time someone trusted me with their story, I was invited in to *feel* with these patients at the different stages of their lives. I was welcomed into their hopelessness, frustration, loneliness, or pain, as well as their triumph, determination, and hope; not to fix or *do* anything, but to share in that feeling and hold it with them. Listening deeply allowed me to practice compassion in a new way, and as I move forward to a career in medicine where I will undoubtedly have a lot to *do*, I hope to also be sure to make space for this kind of true listening.



## 2022-2023 Welcome & Commissioning

By Shannon Curran  
BSVM Director

*The following reflection was shared at our 2022-2023 commissioning ceremony*

*God meant things to be much easier than we have made them .*

*What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute ... we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.*

*- Dorothy Day, Catholic Worker, June 1946*

We are so pleased to celebrate and to commission our newest community of Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers.

Volunteers, in today’s liturgy of the Word, we hear from the sacred scriptures as well as from Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. In these excerpts, Day writes, “We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love.” The ministry of presence that you will practice with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is just that — doing nothing but love.

Now, Day shares that there is “nothing we can do but love” just after she writes that “what [the Catholic Worker] would like to do is change the world.” Isn’t it striking that, in order to change the world, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — one can do but love. Understanding a ministry of presence is often the biggest learning curve for volunteers (or for anyone). It’s much easier to *do* than to *be*, to fix than to sit and visit, to distract in the name of productivity than to be still and share.

When we are *simply* present with one another (remember, *simple* is not the same as *easy*), it’s made clear that the other is enough, that I am enough, and that, together, we are enough. Each moment that we choose to recognize God’s presence in the other, in ourselves, and in our togetherness, we drop our pebbles in the pond.

The work of love is the work of *not doing*. It’s this *not doing* that makes room for the Spirit and, therefore, brings the power that can change the world — one pebble at a time creating circles in the pond.

By making the decision to say yes to BSVM, you’ve accepted this invitation to commit to do nothing but love this year. We are grateful for your commitment and for the chance to walk with you this year as we all look for moments to drop our pebbles in the pond by being with.

With a blessing after communion today, we celebrate the good news of your commitment, as well as your circles in the pond.



The 2022-2023 Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers and the BSVM Staff celebrate following the Commissioning Ceremony in September

# Sisters' Corner

By Emily Thrush | BSVM Site Leader

BSVM is grateful for the opportunities to introduce the Ministry Volunteers to the broader Bon Secours family beyond their immediate context in Richmond. Our four new Volunteers traveled from California, Arizona, Nebraska, and New York to begin full orientation days to help them get to know one another, their neighborhood, their ministry sites, the city of Richmond, and to begin to understand the context and legacy that marks the path they are following in the mission and ministry of the Sisters of Bon Secours.

Our orientation included a cooking class at the Bon Secours Sarah Garland Jones Center for Healthy Living; a walking and driving tour of Richmond; team-building exercises to develop their community; a meal with alumni; a Nonviolent Self-Defense course facilitated by DC Peace Team; introductions to many supportive people in Richmond, Marriottsville, and Baltimore; a tour around Bon Secours initiatives in Baltimore; and reflections prepared by staff to introduce our program pillars and begin the work of sharing, reflecting, and acting on new lessons learned.

Sr. Chris Webb met the newly arrived Ministry Volunteers in Richmond and shared about the mission and charism of the Sisters, and Sr. Elaine Davia shared about the history of the congregation and the global work in which the Sisters are currently involved. Sr. Elaine reflected upon the experience meeting this new cohort and fielding their questions: "It is always a delight to meet the new volunteers each year and share the history and charism of the Sisters of Bon Secours with them as a part of their orientation. Religious life has changed in many ways in recent history. One of the obvious changes is our transition from all of us doing full time direct hands-on care to us as a community taking a stand for issues through advocacy, investment commitments, marches for causes, etc. This year's Volunteers demonstrated a wonderful awareness of the need for all of us to look for and work on the underlying causes of the problems and disparities in the world. I was impressed with how this need was reflected in each of their questions."

BSVM Staff and Volunteers were grateful to gather with a dozen Sisters in the Oratory in the Retreat and Conference Center to share in a Commissioning Liturgy, presided over by Fr. Joe Muth, and ending with a special blessing and anointing from each sister who was present. The prayer of blessing at the conclusion of the service included outstretched arms towards the Volunteers and a collective chorus of voices saying: "Walk with them now and always, and grant them hope and faithfulness for the journey ahead. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."



**Top:** Sr. Elaine Davia, Congregation Leader, blesses Volunteers at Commissioning Ceremony

**Middle:** Sisters and BSVM Staff bless Volunteers

**Bottom:** Sisters and Volunteers enjoy a time of fellowship following the ceremony



# Alumni Profile: August Kunkel

By August Kunkel | BSVM 2014-2015



August Kunkel served in Baltimore in the 2014-2015 service year, and then went on to the University of Wisconsin-Madison Medical School. August now practices medicine in Baltimore where he lives with his wife (Sarah Ceponis, BSVM 2011-2012) and two children.

**How did your experience with BSVM shape the years following your year of service?** Following BSVM, I started medical school in Wisconsin and am now back in Baltimore as an internal medicine resident at University of Maryland. I have learned so much about how to diagnose and treat illness, but because of my time with Bon Secours, I am also always thinking

about patients as people, too. I try to be sensitive to the bigger picture and slow down to recognize what stories lie behind what I read in charts. Unfortunately, medical school and residency don't offer much time for slowing down and simply being present, but my year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry allowed me to grow in this way and are skills I keep using.

**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?** Perhaps one of the biggest gifts received during my time of service was growing in relationship with my community – both my fellow volunteers and my neighbors in West Baltimore. It was especially meaningful to feel so connected to the community when I matched back in Baltimore for residency, in March 2020 as Covid hit.

During such a fragile time for everyone, I felt like I could be a better physician since I had experience with the patient population in West Baltimore, and felt like I could personally meet the challenges of being a health care worker at the time because I had a network of friends and neighbors already here.



August along with his wife Sarah and their two children



August with the 2014-2015 cohort on their first day of service

**What advice do you have to offer former volunteers as they continue to process their BSVM experience?** It is definitely a hard transition to go from a ministry of presence to a faster pace and a job or further schooling that looks and feels different. I encourage former volunteers to seek out colleagues who share similar values and process your experiences together. In every hospital I've worked in, I have found coworkers and mentors who have focused on marginalized populations, or equity in health care, or social determinants of health. It has helped me think about what path to take as a physician by observing other physicians living out the pillars that drew me originally to BSVM.

## Friend of BSVM: Drew Burrichter



Conversation with Drew Burrichter, VP Mission, Bon Secours Richmond

*Drew Burrichter is Vice President of Mission in the Bon Secours Richmond Health System. He has connected with our Ministry Volunteers in Richmond over the last several years. Drew has been instrumental in helping BSVM reinvigorate a bereavement project that had faded, and we appreciate his encouragement and support in our service and formation year with each new group.*

### ***How were you first introduced to BSVM?***

About four years ago, I was a mission leader with Bon Secours and I remember Dave Belde, who was the Market Vice President for Mission, was talking about securing housing for a group of volunteers. BSVM already existed in Baltimore, and we were inviting BSVM to Richmond. I met some volunteers that first year. I also remember there was a request for blankets and bedding for the new house, so I got a big comforter and donated it to house, so that was part of my introduction as well.

### ***How have you seen the Volunteer Ministry help to expand the work of the Sisters in Richmond?***

I would say in a couple of ways. For one, they always go into challenging areas. The fact that they are volunteers and give of their time, show up, try to make do with the skillset that they have, and they're open to learn more is an incredible modeling and an inspiration to the Bon Secours Mercy Health Associates who are there. When they see young people with college degrees willing to take time out of their lives to work side by side with them in usually difficult areas like the Emergency Department or Behavioral Health or Spiritual Care at Richmond Community – that is inspiring to people. It's not the same, but it's in a similar way as the Sisters are often inspiring to people. I think at the root of it, people recognize that the Sisters are committed to this work in a way that none of us are committed to it. It's an aspirational thing that we all kind of aspire to but aren't there, and I see these Ministry Volunteers as a reflection of that kind of impetus, that kind of presence in the broader ministry.

### ***What gifts have you observed from the Ministry Volunteers over the years?***

While I haven't been as involved in the day to day, I do know that our departments are very grateful for them and the presence they provide, because I've gotten that feedback. There is a place where I have been involved in connecting with the volunteers. Years ago, we had a Bereavement Center of Excellence, which grew out of Bon Secours Hospice and became a center for bereavement resources for all of Richmond. I heard about a best practice from elsewhere that some health systems were able to get volunteers to write sympathy cards to all the families who had a loss within the system, so that became part of our work: people get a sympathy card before they get a bill, and that's more representative of who we are and hopefully their experience of us as a ministry.



Drew welcomes the Volunteers during their orientation

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This expression of sympathy is very powerful in the healing process when someone has a loss, especially from the facility where it happened. Not only does it represent who we are as a sincere expression of our caring for them, but it helps the individuals in their grieving process. That had been done at the Bereavement Center, but then for a variety of reasons, this resource of sympathy cards to the whole market dropped off. Hospice still sends cards out, but we didn't have people to send to families outside of Hospice. Now, the Ministry Volunteers provide this resource for the ministry in Richmond, which includes every family that's had a loss in our hospitals.

*What would be a hope that you have for this new cohort beginning in Richmond this year?*

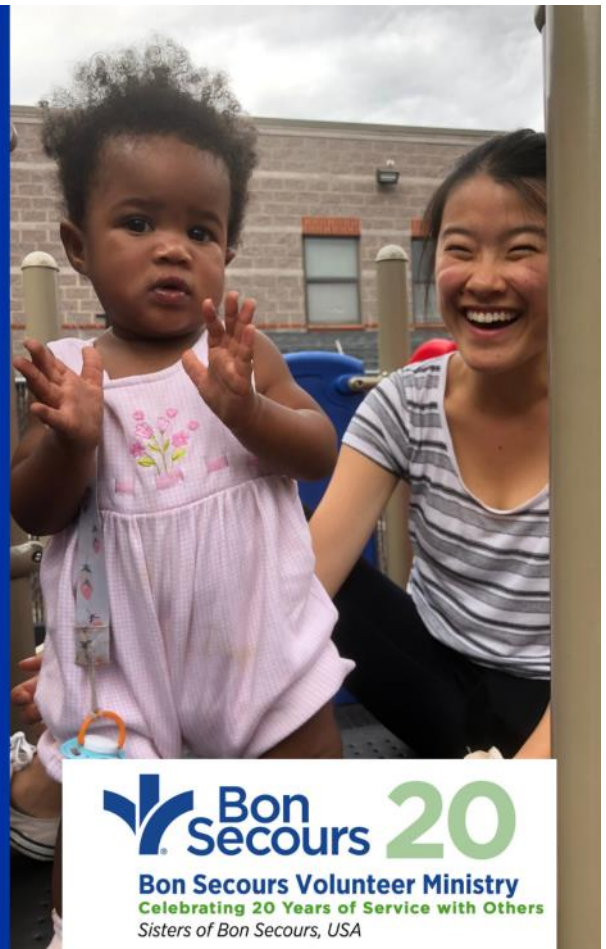
My hope for the Volunteers is what I shared in the BSVM Welcome at the Sarah Garland Jones Center: that they find first their spiritual center, and that with that, they find their role in the world. I hope that this spiritual center helps them find their prophetic voice. At the event, I shared a dramatic example of one of the Sisters exercising the prophetic voice, but I think that prophetic voice can land anywhere. When you talk about issues around justice and equity, I think a prophetic voice is important. Even if that voice is sometimes more of a whisper, that's ok, because sometimes that's the best way. It's about finding that voice and your presence in the world. That's a big ask, but I do think this kind of year (having gone through something like it myself) of intense attention and focus goes leaps and bounds to getting towards that goal.

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

- **Reflective** on community & justice
- **Eager** to build relationships
- **Able** to live simply
- **Dedicated** to spiritual growth
- **Yearning** to grow through service with others

REFER THEM TO BSVM FOR OUR  
2023-2024 MINISTRY YEAR!

Send contact info to [volunteer@bshsi.org](mailto:volunteer@bshsi.org) or fill out contact form at [bit.ly/joinusapply](https://bit.ly/joinusapply)





## Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

1525 Marriottsville Road,  
Marriottsville, MD 21104

### Cover Photo

The 2022-2023 Volunteers with the Sisters of Bon Secours during our fall Commissioning Ceremony. Taken by Liz O'Neill, Director of Communications

### BSVM Staff

Shannon Curran, *Director*

Emily Thrush, *Site Leader*

Ann Schwartz, *Recruitment 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 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](mailto: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*

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