



Beyond the Suitcase



Julianne Esteves | 2022-2023 | A graduate of the College of the Holy Cross

“Julianne, why would you stuff your suitcase *that* much!?” my mother said to me as she found me standing beside our car trunk in disbelief. I had packed the largest suitcase I owned to the point that its zipper popped open, and my clothes were ready to spill out. “Mom, I can only bring two suitcases with me. That’s what they said.”

One of the biggest shifts in my lifestyle this year has been in my effort to “live simply,” one of the five foundational pillars of BSVM. In only a short amount of time, I have realized that what I thought living simply entailed was rather narrow-minded. After reading the BSVM handbook over the summer, I was a bit intimidated by how seemingly “restricted” I would be. I was encouraged to fit all of my belongings in two suitcases, and I would be living on a modest stipend, which meant things like fewer dinners out and a house without wireless internet. In response, I told myself that it wouldn’t be too bad, and I tried to strategically pack as many items into my two largest suitcases. Ultimately, my stuffed suitcase broke moments before I began the six-hour drive to move from New York to Richmond. First attempt at living simply: failed.

As I transitioned to Richmond and into the Emergency Department (ED) at Richmond Community Hospital, I learned that living simply encompassed more than just the quantifiable items and experiences I had. After all, as Joan Chittister states, “If simplicity doesn’t have more to do with living well than with the number of things we

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Editor's Perch

By Emily Thrush | BSVM Site Manager

BSVM spends a lot of time each year recruiting for our next cohort of Ministry Volunteers. In the winter and spring, we're interviewing applicants and sharing about our mission and values as we listen to their stories and prayerfully consider inviting potential new Volunteers. As we describe our intention to become good neighbors in the communities of West Baltimore and East Richmond, we affirm the "acts of service and creation" that are already occurring in these neighborhoods, believing that each potential Ministry Volunteer will join in the good work already in motion, contributing their particular light and love to co-create with God and magnify the existing good. Whether a longtime local or a new neighbor, we believe each person's acts are "met and multiplied by the mysterious workings of [God's] Spirit who weaves all things together toward a redemption more good and glorious than we yet have eyes to see, or courage to hope for."

Applicants begin reflecting on our five program pillars, but we acknowledge there is always more to consider and unpack. As each community forms, develops, and grows together throughout a year of service and spiritual formation, we return to each pillar and spend more time connecting the daily experiences of a Ministry Volunteer with the foundations of the pillars, which are rooted in truths from Scripture, from stories told by patients and students, and from texts that teach us more about ourselves, our world, and how we might engage during weekly reflection gatherings.

In this *Companion* issue, you'll hear from two of our current Volunteers who have been expanding their incoming perspectives on living simply and growing spiritually. Through the structures and rhythms of the ministry year, they're tuning their attention to the "brief moment[s] to love," seeing the way God's Spirit is shaping their hearts, guiding their hands, and building relationships among

their community and at their ministry sites. You'll hear from a recent alum, Sara Snowden, who sees the fruit of her labors and love in community "flower in winsome and beautiful" ways in her graduate work and the continued relationships she forged at her ministry site. Every year, we strive to develop community beyond the walls of the Volunteer house to include bonds within a neighborhood faith community and with Bon Secours sisters and colleagues, and this issue points to several of those relationships from people who have been consistent presences to numerous communities of Volunteers. We are grateful for the love and labors of the many who support this ministry and who invest themselves into the work of continuing the love and labors of those who have preceded them. May these reflections encourage you to trust the small moments of love in your daily life, wherever this finds you.

"May our acts of service and creation,
frail and wanting as they are,
be met and multiplied by the mysterious
workings of Your Spirit
who weaves all things together
toward a redemption more good and
glorious
than we yet have eyes to see,
or courage to hope for.

May our love and our labors
now echo your love and
your labors, O Lord.

Let all that we do here,
in these our brief lives,
in this our brief moment to love,
in this the work you have ordained
for this community,
flower in winsome and beautiful foretaste
of greater glories yet to come.

O Spirit of God, now shape our hearts.
O Spirit of God, now guide our hands.
O Spirit of God, now build Your kingdom
among us.

Amen.

(from "A Liturgy for the Labors of
Community" by Douglas McKelvey in
Every Moment Holy, Volume 1)



A retreat centerpiece symbolizing community, centered around the light and love of God

own, it is a virtue only for those who have things to forgo.” Before moving to Richmond, I was reluctant to “forgo” some tangible items and the privilege that came along with that; I uneasily anticipated more things I would “forgo” once I started BSVM. Furthermore, “living well” as a mode of living simply was not on my radar as much. But, when I began to limit some of the previous customs and distractions I had in my life, I found unexpected sources of gratitude. I enjoyed and more fully appreciated the “simple” pleasures in life, like taking a nap on the weekend, enjoying a warm meal prepared by my housemates on a rainy day, and waving to neighbors as I walked around Church Hill. I was challenged to be more intentional with my time, thoughts, and resources as I pulled back from my tendency to scroll through the internet, shop commercially, and strive for productivity. Living simply now meant learning to “live well” with intention rather than with the number of items I could fit in my suitcase.

The BSVM call to live simply also disrupted my previous tendency to cling to productivity, which also happens to be the environment of a typical ED. There, staff strive to decrease patient wait times, and nurses run from room to room to triage, treat, and discharge their patients. Even though I cannot do much clinically, I often feel pressure to find things to do. Thoughts run through my head: “Does the blanket warmer need to be refilled?” or “Does every room have wipes?” or “What patient can I pull back from the waiting room to relieve the charge nurse?”

Although those tasks might be helpful, my role is not tied to how much I do or how many patients I interact with. Rather, I offer a “ministry of presence” to the department, which is more connected to accompanying patients and staff through the highs and the lows of their day and validating their feelings and worth. Living into this new mindset allows me to be more present to the patients and staff. As I sit at the nurses’ station surrounded by frantic people and ringing phones, I simply can observe and listen. I am able to notice a patient that looks concerned because she hears another patient having an asthma attack, and I can attempt to relieve her worry; I see the exhaustion in a nurse’s face that has not had a break yet, and I can ask her how *she* is doing (something she constantly asks of her patients); I can bring a toddler apple juice and coloring sheets while their mother is being cared for.

These “simple” gestures, such as compassionately listening or offering a warm blanket, often have led to my most powerful interactions. For example, when I hand a patient a warm blanket on a cold, rainy day, I can hear the sigh of relief in their breath as they say, “you read my mind!” or “this feels so nice, thank you.” Putting socks on an older man’s swollen feet, exacerbated by the swelling in his arthritic legs, I learned that he lived in a shelter and couldn’t bring himself to ask someone there for assistance. Despite all of the different identities between us that our society might highlight in order to divide us, I felt united to the patient in that moment. The patient was temporarily healed of the pain in his feet, and I felt a sense of peace amidst the chaos right outside our door. I was reminded that I may not be able to solve the world’s largest problems, but there are small actions I can take daily to help bridge divides and foster connection amongst difference. My hope is that, over time and with patient trust, these seemingly smaller moments can light the way for communal healing, something our world deeply needs.

As our director, Shannon, shared during our Commissioning Liturgy, “Simple is not the same as easy.” In only three months, living simply has challenged me in ways that I was not expecting, and it has opened many new opportunities and life-giving moments. Now, I look forward in hopeful expectation of how I will be transformed by this pillar in an ongoing way. And, perhaps, my suitcase will be lighter leaving Richmond than it once was.



Julianne stands by the blanket warmer at Richmond Community Hospital

Finding Peace



Anna Quast | 2022-2023 Volunteer | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

A month or so ago, one of the deacons at Holy Rosary—our home parish in Church Hill North on the east side of Richmond—was giving the homily and began reflecting about personal anxieties and the general topic of making mistakes. He then paused and quoted Rev. James Cleveland’s song, “Peace Be Still.” In connecting the Gospel reading to the daily pressures of our lives, he said with great certainty, “I am here to tell you this morning, Peace! Be still.” I sat with these words for a while, as the deacon’s honesty about anxieties and shortcomings turned my focus onto my own. The idea of finding peace in the everyday certainly eludes me at times. I get caught up in doing the next thing and the thing after that. Forget about peace! I find it hard enough to be still. That Sunday afternoon, however, I found myself pondering more on what peace means to me, especially in this year of spiritual growth.



Anna carols with her hospice colleagues to share holiday cheer with staff and patients

One of the five pillars of the BSVM program—growing spiritually—is quite special in that it challenges our individual understandings of our own spiritualities, calling us to be intentional in how we engage our faiths and individual spiritualities at our service sites, in our BSVM community, and in our daily interactions with those in our communities. While all of the pillars speak to me and intertwine in different and wondrous ways, something about growing spiritually drew me into this year with BSVM.

Despite attending a Catholic university for four years, my faith life felt like it was simmering on the back burner. Sure, I would go to weekly dorm masses. Sure, I would say a prayer here and there. Some classes surely made me think about my faith in new ways. A majority of my time, however, was spent passively engaging in my spirituality. As such, entering into this year of service, I did not feel at peace with my own understanding of my spirituality and how I practice my faith. Part of this unrest is what pushed me to choose not just a year of service but a year of service with Bon Secours.

As a result of that Sunday homily, I’ve begun to explore times I have felt a false sense of peace in the past four years as I let my spirituality sit on the bench. As a person who values harmony and gravitates to what is familiar, I have come to view my empty peace as a result of a desire to avoid conflict. What am I avoiding when it comes to my prayer life? My faith? My relationship with God? Honestly, I am still wrestling with those questions. However, the intentionality in prayer, discussion, reflection, and action that I have experienced in these first months with BSVM has begun to challenge my ideas of peace and what it has to do with my relationship with God.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Maybe Peace is something I cannot fully comprehend. Like the fullness of God’s love for me. Maybe Peace is being fully united with God in Love. This requires intentional action, however. *The Road Back*

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to *You*—a book written by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile that sits on our living room bookshelf and serves as a tool to help us in our personal and spiritual growth this year—offered me a question to ponder as I wrestled with my false sense of peace: “What is my calling or life’s program? Am I pursuing it or postponing it to keep the peace?”

I am called to a life with God. I am called to a life of Love. Yet, as I have said, I had been keeping a false peace that prevented me from actively pursuing God. I chose to do this volunteer program because there was a pull to change something, to do something different. This was a scary decision for me, however, as I was pushing myself beyond my comfort zone and confronting an overwhelming number of unknowns—who I would live with, what service would look like, where I would live, what degree of connection to loved ones I would have, what kind of evolution would my faith have, etc. Despite these unknowns, I decided to take that first step, and now, in the almost four months here in Richmond, BSVM has allowed me the space to learn new ways to engage with God and find a sense of Peace.

While many aspects of community life with BSVM have brought me closer to a sense of Peace, one extracurricular of mine has stuck out in my reflection—choir. Singing in the choir at our parish, Holy Rosary, has given me a way to connect to God and my community through music. Music has always been a point of comfort and connection for me. It has been some time since I sang in a choir, however. I cannot do justice in mere writing to the energy, kindness, and joy the Holy Rosary Choir has when they gather—just watch one of the mass livestreams on Facebook to understand. Tuesday night rehearsals are filled with lots of talk and laughter. Sometimes we talk more than we sing! When Sunday rolls around, I always have a good time. The music is moving, and the people that sit around me are always warm and kind. I love the sound of hearing the different parts come together. I love seeing how the congregation responds and joins in with us. I love sharing the missal with the woman sitting next to me. I love getting warm hugs at the Sign of Peace. I love feeling the emotion in the room during the meditation song we sing after Communion. I feel a sense of Peace.

Similar reflection upon my experiences at my service site—Bon Secours Hospice—has also revealed everyday moments of Peace. Sitting in silence with hospice patients and thus having our connection built solely on our presence to each other reminds me that connection to God comes in those we encounter. Every week, I see a patient who is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. I go to her house so her caregiver can have some time to herself, and the patient and I sit together while she rests or we briefly chat, despite barriers to our communication. More recently, we were sitting on the couch next to each other, and she held her hand up to me. I took it in mine, and she said, “they’re cold.” She was referring to her own hands, and since mine were warm, I knew she wanted me to warm hers up. We were just sitting there, my hands in hers and hers in mine. I looked at her, and she just smiled and laughed. My visits with this woman are easily the highlight of each week. We are unable to communicate in ways I often rely on to forge connections, but that does not stop us from forming a deep relationship. I love how she will look me in the eyes and compliment me when I smile. I love her fuzzy slippers and the warm feeling I get when she laughs. I feel a sense of Peace.

BSVM has provided me with direction and the space to reflect on how I view my relationship with God and connect to God. Choir has helped me to find God in friendships, worship, and joyful music, and the silence I share with hospice patients has shown me the power of presence and how God is there in the smallest exchanges. The false sense of peace I have been struggling with has been challenged in all these moments. It took courage to put myself out there and join choir, and it can still be difficult at times to navigate and sit in silence with hospice patients. Instead of avoiding connection, however, I have dared to push myself out of my comfort zone and to love those I have met here, and, in doing so, I have dared to meet God in these new experiences. It has been all too wonderful discovering more about myself and my relationship with God in my time here so far. In continuing on this journey, I ask for your prayers in this year of spiritual growth. Peace be with you—Peace, be still!

Alumni Profile: Sara Snowden



By Sara Snowden | BSVM 2020-2021

How did your experience with BSVM shape the time following your year of service? Following my year of service, I was lucky enough to remain in Baltimore and continue to work at Sisters Academy of Baltimore while beginning a Master of Public Health at George Washington University. The opportunity to still be connected to the BSVM community and mission through my work at Sisters Academy helped shape my ideas and the values I brought to my master's program. Transitioning back into balancing schoolwork

with my personal and faith life was a big shift, but many of the lessons of intentional living and pausing to listen before making a decision have helped to guide me.

What were some of the gifts you received during your time of service? Have any of these gifts helped you specifically during this time impacted by the pandemic? One of the greatest gifts I received during my time of service was the freedom to say "yes" even in the face of uncertainty. Throughout my service year during the early months of COVID, I was challenged to say yes to new service experiences and embrace the uncertainty with the support of my community and faith. It was a very freeing experience to release my need to control things and my impulse to only pursue opportunities that I thought I could be successful at or knew were within my comfort zone. Since then, I have continued to practice saying yes, embracing a flexible mindset, and trusting that strength comes in many forms and when you least expect it. Whether it is filling in for a new role at Sisters Academy, like chaperoning the 8th grade Outward Bound Camping trip, or saying yes to opportunities in my coursework to work with unfamiliar communities, this gift is one that, while initially hard to embrace, has helped me during this time of pandemic and transition in my life.



Congratulations to Sara and her fiancé, Anthony Mejia, on their recent engagement in fall of 2022



Sara served as a math coach during her BSVM ministry year and assisted students at Sisters Academy

What reading have you found to be informative, helpful and/or inspirational for volunteers in the BSVM formation or for those wishing to continue to explore the pillars of BSVM? The readings on social justice—such as *Urban Injustice* by David Hilfiker—were my favorites during my formation and the ones that helped ground my service and connection to Baltimore. I recently read the *Color of Law*, which expands upon the ideas from *Urban Injustice* and allowed me to continue to process how the historical racist structures the nation is built on both creates injustice and is the bedrock of housing injustice that is the foundation of many injustices still. Another inspirational text I found that brought me back to the pillars of BSVM is *Being Mortal*, which explores ideas of valuing and honoring the sacredness of life and what that means for living a fulfilling life at all stages, while focusing on the vulnerable population of older adults.

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

I am continually grateful for the intentional emphasis that BSVM formation and my community put into learning about the city of Baltimore, and I feel very blessed to still be connected to the city and can share with others the beauty that is often overlooked. Since moving from Baltimore, I was intentional about learning about my new community in Washington, DC, and it has helped me find God and look for opportunities to practice justice as I plant new roots. I am surprised by the things that remind me of my BSVM experience; there are moments when I pause and let those memories wash over me and refresh me even at times when I am busy or in the middle of something else. I would encourage other former volunteers to not think of BSVM as a bounded experience that can never be replicated, but rather as a series of small learning moments that seep into the perspective and lens you bring to the world even after the BSVM experience is over.



Sara and her ministry cohort, Brion Harris and Kelly Flynn, outside of the BSVM Volunteer house in Baltimore, MD

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@bonsecoursusa.org
or fill out contact form at bit.ly/joinusapply



Sisters' Corner

By Emily Thrush | B SVM Site Manager

While the Ministry Volunteers always look forward to connecting with Sisters during their trips to Marriottsville throughout the year, we have also been grateful for regular connections with our Richmond neighbors, Sr. Chris and Natalie. After greeting our current Ministry Volunteers during their orientation in August, Sr. Chris and Natalie have joined our Community Night once a month for communal prayer and festive fun.

In October, we split into three teams that decorated pumpkins (by paintbrush or carver's knife), with social media votes tallying who was the cutest, the creepiest, and the most creative.

In November, Sr. Chris and Natalie helped bless the Advent wreath that the Volunteers used during prayer times in December.

Just before Christmas travels, Sr. Chris and Natalie joined for a reflection on Advent joy, and decorated cookie Christmas sweaters and a gingerbread train. Sr. Chris invited the Volunteers over for a pizza celebration of Founders Day, and we're excited to continue making memories and praying communally with sisters near and far!



Volunteers enjoy a pizza celebration for Founders Day with Sr. Chris and Natalie



Julianne and Sr. Chris show off their cute Tumbling Jack-o-lantern



Sr. Chris hosts volunteers for Founders Day



Sr. Chris and Natalie decorate Christmas cookies with the volunteers

Thank you, Shannon Curran!

Celebrating 15+ years of service as BSVM Director



Shannon receives her 15 year pin from Sr. Elaine Davia at the Founders Day Recognition on January 23, 2023

Special thanks from Sr Elaine Davia, CBS

Area Leader, Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

"I remember vividly 15 years ago when Sr Rosie and I interviewed Shannon for the position of director of our BSVM program. I was impressed with the way Shannon aimed to live the values of justice and simplicity in her own life. As the program grew over time and in depth, I saw just how deeply these and other Gospel values were engrained in the program and her desire to pass the pillars of the program on to the young adults who joined the program. I'm grateful to Shannon for the model she provides our volunteers and me of living the Gospel values deeply. Thank you Shannon for coming to Bon Secours."

Special thanks from Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS

Congregation Leader

"Shannon not only Directs BSVM with professionalism and dedication but LIVES the pillars that she promotes among the volunteers. She is a woman of compassion, deeply rooted in the gospel message of justice, peace and love for the marginalized. I am so grateful and proud of Shannon's 15 years of service and how the witness of her life has strengthened BSVM to be the well-established and respected program that it is today."



Shannon and sisters join BSVM Alumni during their retreat in 2018

Special thanks from our current volunteers, our BSVM Alumni and the BSVM Staff. Shannon, we are very thankful for all that you do to support, lead, grow and nurture Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Thank you!



Shannon along with the BSVM Staff, Ann, Emily and Liesel



Shannon with current volunteers and BSVM Staff

Friend of BSVM: Dr. Joseph Robinson



Interview with Dr. Joe, Music Director, Holy Rosary Catholic Church

Dr. Joseph Robinson has served as the Music Director at Holy Rosary Church for more than 15 years. Through his role, he leads the choir from the piano and stewards the music ministry for the church. In the last five years, three Ministry Volunteers have joined the choir and built relationships with Dr. Joe and the other choir members. BSVM is grateful for this faith community and the welcoming arms it has extended to our Ministry Volunteers!

What gifts have you observed from the Ministry Volunteers over the years? I've seen the excitement, the willingness to want to sing. The best part is they were excited about being a part of the music ministry, being able to join in and fellowship with the choir. The great part of it is that the choir just brings them in; they just engulfed the young people in loving them and caring for them and said, 'you are family now.' The good part is they never wanted anyone to feel like they were an outsider. They embraced every last one of them.

You know what I love about it? Their spirit. The comradery, the joy, the love that they have for what they do – none of those young people has given me any problems at all. They've been faithful, they come to rehearsal, and if they walked or biked over here, the choir members say, 'we'll take you home' because that's just the type of people we are. The parishioners get to see their gifts and their talent, but they don't get to experience the love that we share with each one of them. Holy Rosary is a very loving, caring, kind place.



Rebecca Judge, BSVM 2018-2019, sings with the Holy Rosary Catholic Church choir



Patrick Kollman, BSVM 2021-2022, playing the saxophone at Holy Rosary Catholic Church

How would you say the larger Holy Rosary community, or the choir specifically, has been impacted by BSVM's presence? I know for a fact the choir did not want them to leave at the end of their year. They cried when Rebecca left, they cried when Patrick left, I cried when *both* of them left, because we just fell in love with them. My thing is, young people don't have to do anything, but when they make a decision to be a part of something – to be a part of something that's a ministry, that's ministering to people, that's special. When they're in the choir and they exert themselves, then all of a sudden, the parishioners see and then the parishioners become as excited as we already have been about them. Allowing them to share their *gifts*, that is unbelievable. I mean, we really miss them when they leave. Look, I'm sitting here in November *dreading* that Anna's going to have to leave! We do *not* want July to come! It's wearing us out! It is tugging on my heart strings. And like I said, it has become harder. I thought when Rebecca left, I got emotional. I said I was going to try to have a little more composure, but when Patrick

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came, it got worse! And now here we are with Anna, and I'm realizing, this is not getting any better! Because we love those young people, we love those young people. And I keep saying, there's gotta be a better way.

What is your hope for young people who participate in this type of ministry?

I hope what they experience here with us becomes a lifetime adoration and a lifetime memory of what true love is. And to know that you can experience a group of people that really, genuinely cares about you. The thing about it is what I always tell people from day one: we are a family. This music ministry is a family. Nothing goes outside of here. We keep everything in-house. We talk, we love, we cry, we get angry, we don't always agree, but when it comes to it – the love of Christ and the love of God always rises to the top. Always surfaces. And like I said, it's just heart-breaking to lose them in July. The choir looks at me and says, 'well, you find a way to keep them here.' They were talking about trying to *kidnap* the people! I told them no, you can't kidnap the young people, that's illegal! 'Well, we'll figure something out.' We'll figure something out? Good night, man! C'mon! But we really don't want July to come.



Dr. Joe and Anna at choir practice

BSVM Community Life



It's leg day at Libby Hill Park, and the Volunteers feel the burn!



Volunteers enjoyed pizza with some Sisters while on retreat in Marriottsville

BSVM alumni Mario Sultan and Caroline Kirk continue to live in Richmond and helped Axell celebrate his birthday with homemade kombucha





Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

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Cover Photo

The 2022-2023 Volunteers during the Christmas season. Taken by Emily Thrush, Site Manager

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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@bonsecoursusa.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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