



Closing Reflection: Experiencing God's Goodness



By **Armel Mignondje** | BSVM 2022-2023 | A graduate of the University of Notre Dame

To start the story of how I have come to know God in a new way this year, it's important to say how significant faith has been to me since I was young, shaping how I interact with the world, how I think, and how I interpret experiences. Around the age of 8, my faith developed when my mom forced me to pray the rosary with her, which helped my beliefs take root and opened the door to someone bigger than myself: God. In the beginning, I viewed and related to God as someone who cared for and provided for the poor. As I grew spiritually, I wanted to love God and belong to God. Loving God meant I needed to attune my life to God's way, but I realized that some of my behaviors contradicted that desire, so I strove to change things like not turning in my homework, being disruptive, and getting into trouble at school. I resolved to amend my life by myself, which means I struggled.

I struggled with prayer, for example. I knew I needed to pray daily and put pressure on myself to do it, but that **did not work**. With Jesus' aid, my prayer life developed my senior year of high school. At my boarding school, I started going to the tabernacle, beginning with small periods and slowly building up time each day. In that space, I could bring my weary heart and leave refreshed and energized. Here, Jesus showed me He could support and comfort me, helping me manage all my responsibilities. Moving on, in college, I could go to Jesus overwhelmed, needing more time. Later, sometimes a class got canceled, an assignment got dropped, maybe a day off from school and other things occurred that would help me. In addition, Jesus provided me understanding in my struggles. I could relate to Jesus in His sufferings, and He supported me through the people He placed in my life. Through these actions, I knew Jesus was present. Regardless, I would still

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Editor's Perch



By Emily Thrush | BSVM Site Manager

While all of our program pillars are interconnected and significant, the heart of our ministry is to foster space for spiritual growth in the lives of individual Ministry Volunteers and each unique community that forms year to year. Wherever someone is in their spiritual

journey when they begin BSVM, we want to see them deepen, expand, and appreciate more aspects of their spiritual identity and experience of God in our year together. We see some of the fruit of this spiritual growth across several communities in this issue of *The Companion*.

This summer, we're continuing to celebrate our 25 years of ministry, and for this issue, we highlight some of the pillars of support in our early days through a conversation with BSVM's first director, Eileen Kiefer, as she remembers Sr. Anne Marie Mack, CBS and recalls the impact of her presence as BSVM was established. We hear Armel's closing reflections from his year of service and spiritual formation, as he bears witness to God's goodness, joy, and expansive love becoming ever more real to him as the year went on. We hear Destiny's reflections as a BSVM alum, seeing the practices she has retained from her year of ministry, and honoring the gifts of building community that continue to serve her now in medical school. These testimonies reveal "a resilient and stubborn form of faithfulness" that invites each of us to consider our own spiritual journeys in their light.

"An evolving faith brings the new ideas and ancient paths together. It's about rebuilding and reimagining a faith that works not only for ourselves but for the whole messy, wide, beautiful world. For me, this has proven to be deeply centered in the Good News of Jesus. An evolving faith is sacramental, ecumenical, embodied, generous, spirit-filled, truthful, and rooted in the unconditional, never-ending love of God. It isn't a linear experience of one and done and dusted. An evolving faith is a resilient and stubborn form of faithfulness that is well acquainted with the presence of God in our loneliest places and deepest questions."

(Sarah Bessey in Field Notes for the Wilderness: Practices for an Evolving Faith, 12)



BSVM uses the labyrinth as a prayer practice on retreat

You'll also read the varied but interconnected ways that volunteers from the last several communities in BSVM have grown to understand 'service' in all its complexities and ramifications, including: "moments of connection," "accompaniment," "togetherness," "relationship based on care, respect, and playfulness," and "giving and receiving grace and acceptance." This expansive view of service, "rooted in the unconditional, never-ending love of God" (Bessey) contributes to the great privilege and gift of transformative relationships in a year of spiritual growth.

May we allow these stories to provide encouragement as we embody our own spiritual faith, taking ownership of the practices that bring life, and opening ourselves to live sacramentally, tuning our minds, hearts, bodies, and schedules to pay closer attention to God's presence, goodness, and love all around us.

sometimes question life, sometimes struggling with why God created me and let me suffer. Intellectually, I knew that God was good and all-knowing, but I still wondered.

God ended up helping me, leading me to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry to **deepen our relationship. With a spiritual director's guidance, I started attempting to remain in the places where it felt easy to receive God's love and trust Him. This could be sitting with lyrics of a song like 'I choose you', which my house listened to on the way up to our winter retreat. Although the words aren't perfect** theologically, when I imagined singing the song with God, I felt loved and chosen. Also, my director released me from binding myself to a prayer agenda. He **encouraged me to follow wherever God's love guided me, giving Jesus all the time** I had intended for prayer. Sometimes this meant just sitting and enjoying that I was loved by God for the entire period, which was great. Around this time, I came to understand that God the Father loves me as a son, cares for me, and is attentive to what happens in my life. This realization had been forming for a while. It germinated as I woke up one night and reflected on how the Father gave His only Son for me, which inspired me with love. Other things contributed to the growing realization, and I recognized how much the Father saw, heard, and cared for me.



Armel with his mom at his white coat ceremony

As I continued diving in, **God's goodness took on a personal meaning for me. From working on my "graced history," which is an assignment BSVM has us do looking back on our lives through God's eyes, I looked back and saw Jesus entering my life, altering its course, and bringing good things into my life like mentors and friends. Through this, it was easy to know Jesus loved me. One time during a period I easily felt loved, I went before the tabernacle, which my director encouraged as a good place to pray. I reflected on Jesus' goodness in my life and how much joy it brought me. From previous classes, I understood that God cannot change, which helped me realize Jesus would always be good. Because God's unchanging goodness brought me joy, I knew I could always count on it, finding joy regardless of life's circumstances. Later, Jesus showed me His love was unconditional. Even when I felt like I was falling short because I struggled interiorly with anger and failed at perfection, I could still feel loved. Receiving God's love when I felt unworthy confused me. I believed my weaknesses and short-comings had the power to stifle God's affection, but Jesus showed me that nothing could separate me from His love.**

Realizing how much God loves everyone, I found more joy. Once on the Behavioral Health floor of Richmond Community Hospital, I was with a patient moved to tears by a song affirming God's presence and faithfulness in her life, which showed me God's care in comforting someone who was suffering. I glimpsed the good things in the lives of my housemates like family, and the depth of the stories everyone shared about where they met God that day or week, whether it was through patients, communal prayer, or colleagues. All these things



Armel with his Site Supervisors from Richmond Community Hospital, Behavioral Health

increased my perception of God's presence. Somewhere during all this, I thought about how I would have never been able to know God and experience His goodness if I had not been born, which gave me gratitude at just being alive. Understanding that God is greater than everything, I know Jesus' goodness overshadows any evil I or anyone could ever experience. I believe more and more that I can trust Jesus, turning to Him in everything.

This year with Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has taught me a lot. Through it, I came to know and understand that I could trust in the following truths no matter what: I am a beloved son, God is truly good at every moment, and God loves me and others always.



The 200th Anniversary of the Sisters of Bon Secours



BSVM 2022-2023 with their prayer partners



Sr. Fran with Delaney & Elizabeth, BSM 2019-2020



Sr. Mary Regina with Mark, BSM 2019-2020



Sr. Rosie with BSM 2018-2019



Sr. Alice with Julianne, BSM 2022-2023

CONGRATULATIONS to the Sisters of Bon Secours on their 200th Anniversary! On May 18, 2024, the sisters hosted an Anniversary Mass at the Baltimore Basilica followed by a reception to celebrate this special occasion. The evening was beautiful and filled with gratitude, love, and joy as those in attendance celebrated the past, present, and future of the Sisters of Bon Secours.

BSVM is especially thankful to the sisters for their ongoing sponsorship of our ministry and for the myriad ways in which they support us. From their presence at our opening and closing liturgies, to partnering with a volunteer during their year to pray and connect, to sharing a meal, playing a game, to making us laugh, for your continual prayers — we are grateful!

Thank you, Sisters of Bon Secours, for touching so many lives and making a difference through your commitment to BSVM.



The Sisters of Bon Secours at the Baltimore Basilica for their 200th Anniversary Mass on Saturday, May 18, 2024



Sr. Elaine with BSM 2021-2022



Sr. Mary Rita with Amanda, BSM 2016-2017

Celebrating our 25th Anniversary

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry is proud to continue the celebration of our 25th year of ministry! Since our beginning in 1999, we have accompanied over 110 young adults as they immerse themselves in the charism of Bon Secours and open themselves to be transformed through service with others.

As a ministry of community, B SVM would not be where we are without the support and guidance of many. From the Sisters who sponsor the ministry, to our volunteers who commit to this year of transformation, to our alumni who continue to grow in the mission of B SVM and support the ministry long after their ministry year ends, to our staff who provide the leadership, infrastructure, and formation, and to the numerous friends and family we've met along the journey who support us in countless ways through prayer, financial donations, and much more – we say thank you! We appreciate your support and take this moment to celebrate our past, our present, and our future.



2021-2022



2018-2019



2015-2016



2012-2013



2003-2004



2006-2007



2009-2010

Learning through Service with Others

Reflections from 2020-2021, 2021-2022, & 2022-2023 BSVM Communities

What does it mean to learn through service *with* others? What does reciprocity look like when young adult ministry volunteers meet neighbors who have lived in a particular neighborhood in Richmond or Baltimore for decades? Must we be the same to serve with our full hearts?

These are questions that a BSVM community engages with throughout their year of spiritual formation and service. We base our desire to serve in the story of God

meeting God's people through Christ who set aside power and privilege and made a home amongst those who had been marginalized. He built relationships across social barriers and embodied unconditional love in meeting people exactly where they were. Service in the way of Christ, therefore, must be rooted in love and in understanding the mutual gift when we work together towards the common good.

At the end of a BSVM year, we reflect on the lessons learned, the relationships fostered, the re-framing, un-learning, and re-building that has taken place in the year of transformation and growth. Below, you'll read some new definitions and frameworks of service that emerged from our time of synthesis over the last few years.

"An Acronym for 'SERVICE':

- S**ee God in everybody
- E**njoy the present moment
- R**elationships come first
- V**iew every person and task with the respect they deserve
- I**nvide others into the work, and accept the invitation of others
- C**ultivate a caring and compassionate approach
- E**mbrace the uncertainty that comes with service"

"Service: being fully present, seeking true understanding, and posturing oneself to love unconditionally and without limit."

"Service means recognizing my interconnectedness with all people and connecting with those struggling, affirming their dignity and seeing Christ through them and in that bond. We all belong to the same human family."

"This year, my service has been centered around giving and receiving grace and acceptance. I was shown grace over and over again by my site supervisors, co-volunteers, and the students. As I served, I was reminded daily that everyone lacks something and we all need grace to continue doing the work that God has called us to do."

"Service taught me the more I learn, the more I want to love these students."

"Service is about being with others, being with community. In these moments of togetherness, we are experiencing God in the small yet powerful ways, in and through each other. Service is about connecting to the holy in the shared moments of the day to day – in the silence and laughter, tears and smiles, sorrows and joys."

"Service invites people into moments of connection that God is working through and attentive to. One can engage in service by deeply listening, reflecting others' experiences onto our own, and pondering where the root of brokenness lies so that eventual healing and liberation can be achieved."

"Service is the instrument, the set of strings that bridge and connect. Service is coming to Love the tension in the strings and the desire to play music with them for all to hear. The melody then becomes the echo of Love that resonates within all who listen. It is our duty to pick up this instrument and play it."

SERVICE IN ACTION



Christian Wood, BSVM 2018-2019



Mikayla Haefele,
BSVM 2020-2021



Rebecca Obendorf
BSVM 2012-2013

“Service is about accompaniment, learning, & helping others and yourself, however it is needed.” (Volunteer, 2021-2022)



Beatriz Cuevas, BSVM 2017-2018



Abbi Cerezo
BSVM 2016-2017

“Service is a relationship based on care, respect, and playfulness that allows space for healing and growth. It is justice work that centers on people rather than a system and aims to achieve common goals through God’s love and community building.” (Volunteer, 2020-2021)



Jenna Vrale, BSVM 2019-2020

Friend of B SVM: Eileen Kiefer



L to R: Eileen Kiefer, Marie Truffer B SVM (Retired)
Administrative Assistant, Shannon Curran,
Current B SVM Director

Conversation with Eileen Kiefer

B SVM Founding Director, serving from 1997-2005

B SVM celebrates 25 years of ministry this year, which began with the vision and initiative from Sr. Nancy Glynn, CBS and with the leadership of Sr. Anne Marie Mack, CBS, and Eileen Kiefer. We're grateful for Eileen's work of creating Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry and for the Sisters of Bon Secours continually supporting this transformative ministry. The foundation Eileen laid has contributed to over 110 young adults being shaped by the charisma of Bon Secours.

How did you get connected to B SVM?

There was a brief advertisement in the local paper, the *Columbia Flyer*, and it just said, "Director of Volunteers, Bon Secours." I knew Bon Secours through the Retreat Center because I had been there for different reasons, so I had this expectation that it was for those who volunteer at the Retreat Center – you know, greeting people, helping people get to their rooms, that kind of thing! So I went and there were 4-5 people in this interviewing group. There were a few of the sisters (Sr. Nancy Glynn, Sr. Elaine Davia, Sr. Pat Dowling), the director of the Bon Secours Associates, Jean, and a priest who was the Director of the Capuchin program at the time named Fr. Bill. Everybody's talking but he was kind of quiet. He looked at me and said, 'have you seen the job description?' I said, 'no, I responded to an ad in the paper.' And he said, 'I think you need to read this.' And I said, ok! Then I realized the scope of things.

Sr. Nancy talked more about the vision of it. She explained that different congregations have young adults serving in a volunteer program, and the interview went from there. Later, I got the call that they wanted to offer me the job, but they said that Sr. Anne Marie will be my supervisor but she's out of the country. When she got back, we met and realized we were both born and raised in Philadelphia, so we went on for I don't know how long, just about that, and that started our relationship off on a good footing.

This many years later, I'm so glad that the Volunteer Ministry is still going on! It warms my heart to know that it's working!



L to R: Kim Acqualino (B SVM 2004-2005), Eileen Kiefer
(Director 1997-2005), Sarah Gillis (B SVM 2004-2005),
Emily Schenk (B SVM 2004-2005), and Kim Flash
(Director 2005-2006)



B SVM 2004-2005 Volunteers with Director (L to R):
Sarah Gillis, Eileen Kiefer (Director), and
Lauren LaRue

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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

I think having former volunteers remaining connected to Bon Secours – **there's 2-3** that I keep in touch with **and then Marie [former BSVM administrative assistant] who keeps in touch with others. That's a long time!** It just tells me what the connection can be.

I also appreciated working with other organizations doing similar work. One year, I had our Bon Secours volunteers share a living situation with Mennonites in Richmond, and I did it in Baltimore with ProjectServe (with the Archdiocese of Baltimore) for 2 years. I could have done it differently and kept mine separate – but I felt like the community life aspect is what keeps it more fun and enriching. Luckily, the other director and I got along. The Mennonite volunteers were a different personality, but the volunteers were willing to enter into it and learn from each other and respect each other.

One of the things it gave me on a personal level was that my middle daughter did a similar program out in Los Angeles, which helped provide her direction and a path when she was struggling after a rough first year of college. **If I had not had that job with Bon Secours, I don't know where my daughter would be. And my 3rd daughter did an AmeriCorps program as well.**

Do you have a word of wisdom for young adults who are considering a year with BSVM?

Take the risk and do it! It's not just about helping people, it's about living a life of being in communion with the people.

Alumni Reflection



Destiny's first day of medical school

By [Destiny Cates](#) | BSVM 2020-2021 | A Graduate of William & Mary

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

Following my year of ministry, I started an MD program at Eastern Virginia Medical School. My experience with BSVM encouraged me to continue valuing and making time for reflection. One of the biggest questions that I get asked now from students starting medical school is, **“How much will I be able to do outside of studying?”** or, **“Will I be able to have a life outside of being a medical student?”** It is definitely a valid question because of the increased rigor of medical school, but one that I cannot really answer for them. Now that I am in my third year, I know that I would not have survived if I had only treated myself as a medical student. The things that sustained me before medical school had to be included in my life. I was introduced to many authors, books, ideas, poems, readings, and practices in BSVM that were very uplifting and nourishing to me, and to not look back at them for comfort or strength seemed like a disservice to myself. One of my

favorite tools to use for reflection during my year with BSVM was the Daily Examen. I ended up taping a copy of the questions near my bed at home once the year was over so that I could see them before going to sleep at night.

Another idea that stuck with me from BSVM is the value of creating/maintaining community. As a commuter student who lives 20-30 minutes away from other medical students, I found it challenging at first to feel a sense of belonging with my class. Going from living, playing, and working with my community mates almost 24/7 to being physically distant from my classmates was a big change, and one that I had to be intentional with if I wanted it to improve. **I had to let go of that feeling that I was “bothering people” or being too overbearing in order to create that sense of community that I was craving.** I was able to leverage the fact that I am living in an actual home with a

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Destiny honored for excellence in volunteerism with other med students at the HOPES Free Clinic

discipline that you learned through BSVM, it may not be possible to replicate exactly. You will probably have to get creative, modify things, carve out different times in your day, and experience more trial-and-error. All of that is okay. Give yourself grace and ask yourself what you want to feel in this new chapter of life and what practices can help you to achieve that. It was a great blessing to go home with a copy of the *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* at the end of my year. I use it occasionally to guide my prayer time or to get inspiration for group prayer time with friends. In my journaling time, I recall lines and phrases that used to be important mantras for me during BSVM. Even though life circumstance will definitely change, that spirit that you and God cultivated within you in this formative time will not go away. Use that to guide you and don't be afraid to get creative and accept what sticks.

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? I really loved *The Road Back to You*, the enneagram book that we read towards the beginning of our year. I think there is a lot of grace and love found in the enneagram system that can help us appreciate our deeper selves while also

understanding and seeing the best in others. I also loved learning and reading about Homeboy Industries in California in *Barking to the Choir*. I think the way that they run that program is the epitome of love, acceptance, hope, and redemption. Both of these readings expanded my sense of empathy and oneness with God's created people.

What were some of the gifts you received during your time of service? How have these gifts helped you now?

I think I was able to expand upon my gift of creating community during my service year. I appreciated the opportunities that BSVM gave us to lead formation times, present resources to each other, and serve our community members through our own created liturgies. These processes made me feel very in tune with God and with the needs of my community mates. Outside of BSVM, I have continued to create little liturgies for my family, classmates, and friends to break through the routine of ordinary time and let in some sacred time. It is a simple thing to do, and it has allowed me to take more ownership of my faith by exploring passages, readings, and songs for myself rather than always relying on a corporate worship space to do that for me.



Destiny reconnects with Mikayla, a fellow 2020-2021 ministry volunteer



Destiny visiting her sister in Costa Rica

Sisters' Corner: Honoring Sr. Anne Marie Mack, CBS



Sister Anne Marie Mack CBS
August 22, 1947-
March 31, 2024

By Emily Thrush, BSVM Site Manager, in conversation with Eileen Kiefer, first BSVM director (serving 1997 – 2005)

This year, we have been celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours, founded in Paris in 1824 and now an international presence of compassion, healing, and liberation. Within the joy of commemoration, we have also held the tension of grief, as we have marked the loss of three sisters passing on as of this printing. In this issue of *The Companion*, we pause to remember and celebrate the life of Sr. Anne Marie Mack, who was President of the Sisters of Bon Secours, USA when BSVM began at the end of the 20th century.

In order to honor the early foundational years of BSVM, we interviewed Eileen Kiefer, the founding director of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Eileen, who was hired by the sisters in 1997 to begin a ministry focused on offering lay persons the opportunity to be immersed in the charism of Bon Secours, said of Sr. Anne Marie: “she was encouraging and supportive. She said, ‘you’re going to know more about this program than I know what it takes, so I need you to find out more.’ So, for my first year on the job, I did not recruit. I was out visiting other programs, learning from them, spending time with them, going to a retreat with them, and formulating in my head who the sisters are and what a volunteer program looks like.” A placement site that Eileen founded at the Family Support Center became one of our long-time ministry sites at Bon Secours Community Works. “Sr. Anne Marie would give me suggestions about what she thought might be good job sites for the volunteers,” and other sisters would help spread the word about the Volunteer Ministry and suggest additional sites.

Sr. Anne Marie was also the driving force to invite Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry to expand from Baltimore to include a volunteer house in Richmond, VA. In 2018, just before BSVM turned 20, the second volunteer house opened in Richmond. Sr. Anne Marie worked closely with current BSVM director, Shannon Curran, to advocate for and support the expansion of this ministry while Shannon built the staff infrastructure, capacity, programming, and recruitment to fully, and holistically, support a second household of ministry volunteers. Sr. Anne Marie was also instrumental in Bon Secours establishing Cristo Rey Richmond High School and having it sponsored by the Sisters of Bon Secours, USA. Since 2020, BSVM has offered Cristo Rey as a ministry placement, and several volunteers have continued as faculty after their BSVM year.

We are grateful for the support and guidance of Sr. Anne Marie over the life of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry and will continue to share her legacy with our future communities of Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers.



Top to bottom:

- Sr. Anne Marie with BSVM 2018-2019 and other sisters in Richmond
- Sr. Anne Marie & Sr. Vicky with BSVM 2019-2020 in Richmond
- Sr. Anne Marie with BSVM 2022-2023 and other sisters in Marriottsville



Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
 Transformation through Service with Others
 Celebrating 25 Years
 Sisters of Bon Secours, USA

1525 Marriottsville Road
 Marriottsville, MD 21104

Cover Photo

The hands of the 2022-2023 BSVM Ministry Volunteers following the opening liturgy and blessing. Taken by Liz O'Neill, Director of Communications.

BSVM Staff

SHANNON CURRAN, Director
 shannon.curran@bonsecoursusa.org

EMILY THRUSH, Site Manager
 emily.thrush@bonsecoursusa.org

ANN SCHWARTZ, Recruitment Leader
 ann.schwartz@bonsecoursusa.org

LIESEL RUPPRECHT, Program Coordinator
 liesel.rupprecht@bonsecoursusa.org

OFFICE EMAIL
 volunteer@bonsecoursusa.org

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*

BY VENMO @bonsecoursvolunteer

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