



## Living Simply: Finding the Extraordinary within the Ordinary

By **Mary Catherine Hargrove**

BSVM 2024-2025 | A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Today's world is fast, *too fast*—our lives have been built upon endless pathways all leading toward instant gratification. And we are also often faced with that itch to be constantly thinking ahead. *What's next?* Suddenly, the present moment has flown by and it's already time to move onto the next thing. We're hit with that sinking feeling that we ran out of time to enjoy the moment and then it's already time to move onto the next thing. This never quite sat right with me, and it always felt in tension to the way God calls us to live—with surrender to and confidence in His holy will and boundless love for us. Thankfully, God placed BSVM into my path, and I am happy to report that my experience thus far has wonderfully challenged this way of thinking, inviting myself and my fellow volunteers to enter into that beautifully radical way of life that is 'living simply.'

Over the past couple months, I have delved deep into the world of sourdough—a project I've admittedly been wanting to get underway for years. Even being 7 or 8 loaves in now, I still get a giddy excitement over the freshly-baked, successful loaf of sourdough bread coming out of the oven (don't get me wrong—there have been a few flops, too, but still we persist!). I look forward to it every week as a little creation I get to share with the community at the dinner table—a labor of love. When I thoughtfully consider bread beyond its literal sense, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, much in the way God calls us to give witness to Him in *everything* we do, big and small. To me, it's not just bread, but a symbol of the special product of intentionality and a means of fellowship.

At its core, making sourdough bread is really not all that difficult a process. People have been making it for hundreds of years and it essentially consists of just two simple ingredients: flour and water. How hard could it be, right? So why, then, did it take me so embarrassingly long to finally attempt it? Well, I think it was because I underestimated a crucial third ingredient to the sourdough process: *time*.

Time is where all the magic happens; it's what transforms flour and water into a special, living thing that can make dough go from a dense, sticky mess to a fluffy, picture-perfect loaf. While all it truly takes is mixing flour and water together, nothing will happen if you don't let the mixture ferment. Over time, the naturally occurring yeast and

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## Editor's Perch



By Emily Thrush | B SVM Site Manager

When we open ourselves through spiritual habits to hear from God in new ways and through new avenues of encounter, we begin to see ourselves within a greater web of relationships and dynamics than our imaginations had previously conceived. One of the gifts that Ministry Volunteers receive in a year of service and spiritual formation is a sharpened attentiveness to how God moves

in myriad ordinary ways that may go unnoticed if not for practices that help us acknowledge those movements within our own lives and those around us. In this issue of *The Companion*, we hear from two current Ministry Volunteers who have experienced God's mercy through the seemingly simple: Andrew shares moments at his ministry site where music draws people together and injects joy into a place that can feel restricted; and Mary Catherine shares the lessons gleaned by baking bread, walking to the library, and slowing down to receive the present moment.



Art from the 2010-2011 B SVM community

BSVM invites our Volunteers to "keep [their] eyes wide open" and allow "love to be the reason behind all that [they] do" (1 Corinthians 16:13). We saw this intention in full effect during a special moment with the Sisters in the fall on Marian Hall. By being open to God's Spirit, we pivoted from our planned activity and instead received the gift of sharing from lived experiences that crossed generations of faithful ministry. In these pages, we also hear from Alex Meyer, a B SVM alum from 16 years ago who has built his life after B SVM with the values and charism in mind, as he now practices medicine and builds relationships with those he serves: "B SVM taught me that justice is about more than just giving to others out of the excess that we already have. Justice is about viewing others in the image of God and loving and caring for them as such."

Finally, we share some reflections from one of our former Site Supervisors, Ellen Manning, who has served with Bon Secours Hospice and supported our first Ministry Volunteer in that role during our B SVM 2022-2023 community. For Ellen, Hospice shares a special link with the early ministry of the Sisters of Bon Secours since they cared for patients within their own homes. Once in the home, Ellen said, "the hardest thing to teach volunteers is that they do not have to do anything. Their being - that loving presence - is what is needed. Anna did not need to be taught that; she lived that right from the beginning." Our Ministry Volunteers bear witness to countless examples of pain, heaviness, and grief during a given B SVM year. Yet they also see God's presence in the small and sacred moments, and we find that when we share these with each other, "we never lose heart as we walk this road." (2 Corinthians 4:1). May you be encouraged as you read these testimonies of God's love and constancy piercing through the darkness and giving us courage to "stand firm in the faith."

"Since we have received this sacred task through Creator's mercy, we never lose heart as we walk this road."

(2 Corinthians 4:1,  
First Nations Version)

"Keep your eyes wide open. Stand firm in the faith. Be brave and strong. Let love be the reason behind all that you do."

(1 Corinthians 16:13,  
First Nations Version)



L to R: Katie, Andrew and Mary Catherine puzzle in Richmond

bacteria in the flour and air convert the mixture into a leavening agent with that unique, sour flavor profile that transforms your loaf—all just from time and patience (and asking for intercession here and there from St. Honoré, the patron saint of bakers!). And if none of that science-y stuff made any sense to you, that's ok! Like with how God works in our lives, we might not always understand the process, but we can trust that things will always work out in the end!

Flour, water, and *time*. Simple enough, except that we live in a world where time is a precious, limited, highly sought-after commodity that nobody can seem to get enough of these days. I was so worried I wouldn't have enough time of day to get a sourdough starter going that I completely intimidated myself out of even trying in the first place (and newsflash, this thought could not have been farther from the truth!). All too often I find myself at such a loss of how to make use of my "limited" time that I completely miss out on the present moment right before me. Instead, I catch myself wrapped up in mindless, unfulfilling distractions, or thinking and worrying about what tomorrow might look like. Or sometimes I would come home from a long day of work, excited to have some down time, only to catch myself after an hour of scrolling on my phone, *still* feeling in need of that down time.



Mary Catherine excited about her sourdough bread

When I first heard about Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, one thing that really called out to me in the discernment process was the "Live Simply" pillar. There it was, right before me, the opportunity to finally slow down and have the freedom to approach my life a little more simply and intentionally—to realize that I actually have plenty of time in my day, so long as I am intentional with it. No more letting myself get caught up in mindlessness and easy distraction. I was faced with the double-edged question of what am I consuming in my life, and *what in my life is consuming me?* Are these things truly needs, or simply wants? Where is there excess in my life? Where are things taking up too much space?

In a passage from *The Simple Living Guide* we read for our Thursday Morning Reflection, the author Janet Luhrs noted that to live a simple life means to live a life of intentionality. And to be intentional, I have come to realize, is to pay attention to and contemplate how I live in and interact with the world around me; *to find the extraordinary within the ordinary*. For example, I love to read, and have recently started going to the local library in place of buying new books. Part of our BSVM simplicity also entails that we share one car for all five of us, so it invites us to think more closely about our true necessity for driving somewhere as opposed to being able to walk or bike. Walking to the library to pick out new books has become one of my favorite pastimes, and it's seeping with the fruits of simplicity. I am thoughtful about which books I want to pick out. Then, when it's time to go pick them up, I forgo the car and choose to walk to the library, during which I am invited to engage with my neighborhood and community members along my way through the East End. Finally, when it's time to read my books, I get to revel in the simple joy of making a cup of tea (usually peppermint!) and delving into a good story (historical fiction has been a go-to lately!). It's such a simple, yet fulfilling way to spend a Sunday, sabbath afternoon. Other simple joys of this year have included: walking to Libby Park to see the sunset, calling up a friend, and playing cards or doing a puzzle with community mates after dinner.

Through the act of slowing down and leaning into simplicity, I can more clearly see the areas in my life where God is calling me to surrender and cut back so that He can increase within me and fill me with better things. Much like in my bread making journey, I have been seeing the power of *time* and waiting. This year, I have discovered that I actually do have plenty of time for sourdough *and then some*. For sourdough, the process may take up to three days from start to finish, but less than 5% of that is actually me interacting with the dough; the other 95% is just patiently letting it do its thing. This is an insight I have been able to apply to my life of service, too. It can be easy to let myself get caught up in the overwhelming amount of injustice occurring in the world, but even when we engage in service, God calls us to slow down, be intentional, and simply be present. It would be impossible for me to accomplish all of the big ideas of justice I could ever imagine, but there is still so much I can do on a local level, day by day. First and foremost, God just calls us to simply be present to one another. *How can I love the person right before me, my neighbor?* God might be entrusting only "5%" of the justice process to me today, but through time and patience, God takes that "5%" and transforms it into something profound beyond our imagination. Through living out the "Live Simply" pillar, I have joyfully witnessed myself "cutting back" only to gain so much more: a meaningful community, a deeper trust in God, and a heart filled with His love that pours out for justice (and I have also gained some fresh bread, haha!).

# A Song of Service

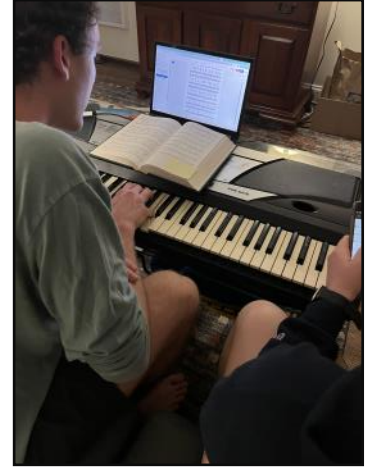


By Andrew Degele

BSVM 2024-2025 | A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Each morning, I begin my day with a simple prayer: To be a light to others and to receive light from others. During these November and December months as the daylight lessens, I have found this prayer apt. Oftentimes as I walk home from

Richmond Community Hospital, the sun is setting and the darkness is settling, the western horizon of Church Hill lit up with the pink and orange brushstrokes of the sunset announcing the impending night. As a volunteer, I find my task for the day to sometimes just be getting that sunlight through the blind-covered windows of the Behavioral Health Unit where I serve. Some of the patients haven't experienced the weather outside in months, instead just being cooped up in their bedroom, hallway, and dayroom of the unit. So I must be that fresh breath of air to them. But as my prayer has been, I find myself just as often in the position of unexpectedly receiving light from those I "serve." The thankfulness and gratitude I encounter each day soften my heart to love more deeply and move me from the inwardness of myself to the outwardness of my neighbor (figuratively and literally because I fall asleep each night seeing the colored LED lights of the hospital across the street through my window). I encounter renewed trust in the human person as patients share their stories with each other and me, and I find joy in the simple but enthusiastic celebration when the same patient wins the Uno game for the third time in a row. "Learn through Service with Others" is an abstract pillar that we encounter so tangibly in the day by day life as Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers.



Andrew practices at the  
BSVM house

But what does "Learn through Service with Others" mean? Let's break it down. To *Learn* is to understand more about facts, subjects, the world, people, and the way God is working in it all. In some MCAT psychology lingo, it's done through methods like classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning. *Through*: by the means of, via, using a conduit. *Service* is helping, giving, offering, oftentimes with a spirit of mercy, of giving without expecting return or repayment. *With*: together, a relationship, two-way, mutual, an exchange. *Others* are our neighbors, the one who is not me. So, put together, the pillar is *to understand by the means of helping, giving, and offering myself in a two-way relationship with one who is not me*. At my service site, I have gotten to experience this kind of understanding through both patients and staff. I have not only gained knowledge in the field of psychiatry, but also learned how to be present to people who are suffering in body and mind, how to listen with an open ear and soft heart, how to rejoice in the small victories, how to be attentive to the spoken and unspoken needs and desires of people, and how to choose joy each day.

One recent experience has given me the opportunity to reflect more fully on this pillar. From late-November to mid-December, I had a very special interaction with a patient who I will call "Dave." He was a former youth minister, a brilliant pianist, and a loving father with a son who was just as talented as himself, if not more, as he would often say. During one of the first days he was there, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, I overheard him talking to the chaplain about wanting to play piano, and the chaplain and the unit's recreational therapist went searching for one but to no avail. It's funny how God works: earlier that same week, Emily, the BSVM Site Manager, had dropped off a used keyboard that Patrick, a previous BSVM volunteer, had bought and left in Richmond. We got the keyboard on the Monday before Thanksgiving, the day before I met Dave. When he started asking to play that Wednesday, and not even to me, I saw it as an opportunity to share. On Black Friday, I brought in the keyboard, and we had our first dayroom jam session. He led us in singing worship music, giving us a jazz concert, and taking pop and oldies song requests from the rest of the patients. The song that he taught us and was a constant during his time at the unit was the song *Trust in God*. It goes, "I trust in God, my Savior, the One who will never fail. He will never fail," and the bridge is, "I sought the Lord and He heard and He answered me (x3), that's why I trust Him, that's why I trust Him." The first time he played it, he and a couple of the other patients cried and sobbed.

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On a day dedicated to materialism and the pursuit of stuff, it was heartwarming to see those with so little—just the clothes they came with and a borrowed keyboard—find joy and encounter God in the simple and the free.

Dave also taught me how to be confident in myself and my abilities—he encouraged me to sing, had me play for him sometimes when he led singing, and convinced me to play songs that I had been practicing at home for the patients. Even when I messed up, he was very patient and loving. He also brought together the staff too—from a thank you concert where the patients sang and read poetry for the staff with me accompanying their singing to the patient and his psychiatrist exchanging repertoires (including *Linus and Lucy* from memory) and duetting *Heart and Soul*.

Early on, he was very hard on himself, demanding perfection and telling me that every time he played, he only listened to his mistakes. For instance, when his son had previously recorded him secretly and then played back his own songs, he was taken aback, and could only pay attention to his errors when he learned they were his own pieces. I think by having time to be still, think, and talk through things like this with me and with other patients, he was able to understand himself and his relationship with God, with his family, and with others than before.

Dave would always hype me up, saying he appreciated my listening skills and crediting much of his improvement (true or not) during his stay to me, and, in a heartwarming note, called me the world's greatest volunteer. He is inspired now to do music therapy and really wants to volunteer to provide music for people struggling with mental health conditions to bring continued healing to others and himself.

On his penultimate day, Dave had the opportunity to make his intention real! Dave was staying on the “general” side of the unit, but on this day, he went and played for the patients on the “acute” side of the unit. Dave was powerfully moved by a patient who we as staff often disregarded and dismissed, me included. Her endless restlessness and unceasing demands despite our best efforts made it difficult to appreciate her, yet Dave, through the simplicity of sitting down, teaching her lyrics, and playing music for her, saw the compassionate, joyful, and loving side of her that we overlooked.

Through my relationship with Dave, I was reaffirmed in my own understanding of service, that it is a vocation to presence, to choosing to be there with an open heart and mind for people to offer, give, and teach me as much (if not more) than I can offer, give, and teach them. I was reassured in my future, that no matter what I end up doing, there is always the opportunity to be attentive and listen to the needs and dreams of others and to encourage them, but also to be open to receiving and drawing strength from others, especially from those who I do not initially expect to learn from. As I continue this year of service, my new prayer each day is this: To receive the light to see the good in that specific patient that Dave saw in her, and by extension, to see the good in all, all of us beloved musicians united in God's beautiful song of service.



(L to R): Katie, Andrew, and Sam shared "Volunteer of the Year" at the Richmond Community Hospital Pillar Awards night

## Sisters' Corner



*Sisters and volunteers gather for a sacred moment of sharing during their fall retreat*

By Emily Thrush | B SVM Site Manager

Anytime B SVM travels to Marriottsville, whether it is for Orientation, a retreat, or by invitation of the Sisters, we love to carve out intentional time with the Sisters who live in Maryland so that our Ministry Volunteers can benefit from the wisdom, love, and fun that is shared when we spend time in person. In anticipation of our Fall Retreat, B SVM staff coordinated with the Sisters to plan for a pizza meal and ice cream social on Marian Hall. About 10 sisters gathered with our five Ministry Volunteers and B SVM staff.

After the meal, where we enjoyed the food and friendly buzz of conversation with the people in our closest proximity, we opened up the “floor” for sharing in the larger circle. Our first thought for that time was to organize a game that would prompt some silliness and bonding. While God can move in the light-hearted, the Spirit moved us in a different way that evening, and the time shifted into a sacred moment of sharing stories from our various expressions of ministry. From the Sisters, we heard stories of tenderness, peace within times of pain, and hope. From the Volunteers, they shared moments where they experienced God’s presence through a patient, a student, a colleague, or one another. Everyone in the circle offered something, and everyone was blessed by the love and compassion we received in the sharing. We are so grateful for the Sisters – our strong supporters and sponsors of this Volunteer Ministry. We learn through their gracious example, and that evening in October at the end of Marian Hall represents a beautiful moment in time that we will cherish for the unexpected turn towards vulnerability and love that we shared.

## Alumni Reflection

By Alex Meyer | B SVM 2008-2009 | A Graduate of Michigan State University

### ***How did your experience with B SVM shape the years following your year of service?***

B SVM instilled core tenets into who I am as a person and how I view my place in the world. After serving in the ministry, I pursued a career in medicine and became a physician. I chose to become a family medicine physician not only to serve those who are sick, but to be able to build relationships with those I serve. B SVM taught me that justice is about more than just giving to others out of the excess that we already have. Justice is about viewing others in the image of God and loving and caring for them as such. I’m thankful to be able to practice this in my profession and also through ministry. I am a board member of a health care ministry that serves neglected elderly, widows, and refugees. My time with B SVM helped me to see the gifts I have, and to be able to use them to help those in need.



*Alex and his wife, Jocelyn*

### ***What advice do you have to offer former volunteers as they continue to process their B SVM experience?***

Hold onto the experiences you have gained from your time of service. As life continues to progress for each of us, there are so many aspects of the world that can distract us from the lessons we have learned and try to continue to practice. Whether it is accumulation of wealth through our careers and the desire for safety and security for ourselves and our families, frustration with political drama near and abroad, or seeing the brokenness in so many of our systems that lead to oppression and suffering, we are so frequently diverted from the call God has for each of our lives: To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. For me, my time in the B SVM ministry was a blueprint on how to do that throughout life. I would encourage you all to hold on to those lessons and use them as a reminder of your purpose when life starts pulling our focus away from who we are supposed to be.

***What reading have you found to be informative, helpful and/or inspirational for volunteers in the B SVM formation or for those wishing to continue to explore the pillars of B SVM?*** The book I recall most from my time in B SVM was *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, edited by Michael Schut.

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## Friend of BSVM: Ellen Manning



Reflections from Ellen Manning, Volunteer Services Manager, Bon Secours Community Hospice

*Ellen Manning served as a Site Supervisor for our first Ministry Volunteer placed with Bon Secours Hospice, Anna Quast, in our BSVM 2022-2023 community.*



*Ellen Manning and Anna Quast  
(BSVM 2022-2023)*

**How were you first introduced to BSVM?** We learned about BSVM through Drew Burrichter, VP of Mission here in Richmond. He spoke to my director and me, and then I had a follow up with Emily Thrush, BSVM Site Manager. When we learned about the program we were very interested and thought it would be a great addition to our hospice program and our ministry within Bon Secours.

**What gifts have you/your staff observed from the Ministry Volunteers in your experience?** The obvious gift was having additional help working with the Hospice volunteer program. Someone just out of college with fresh ideas. Someone exploring a career in health care. However, that was not all. The largest gift we received from Anna was the energy, commitment, and dedication she showed to learning with us, and also how she included it into her spiritual journey that year. We pride ourselves in never losing sight of our hospice program as a ministry. We never forget that the Sisters of Bon Secours started their order by doing what we do – caring for patients in their home. Anna embodied that legacy: Love and caring for the whole person, both physical and spiritual. She brought that commitment to our program. Also the hardest thing to teach volunteers is that they do not have to *do* anything. Their being – that loving presence – is what is needed. Anna did not need to be taught that; she lived that right from the beginning.

**How has the Volunteer Ministry helped to support or expand the work of Bon Secours Hospice?** On Anna's first assignment with hospice, she called our home patient caregivers to check in. On her very *first* call, she encountered a stressed family dealing with what would become the death of the patient. Anna handled it with such grace and maturity, I knew she was going to be a huge help to our patients. And she was. Near the end of her year with BSVM, Anna's voice lifted us all at the Memorial Service. Her flute comforted patients in the hospital and grieving loved ones. Having Anna shadow doctor, nurses, and other team members helped us to feel more connected to the ministry of hospice and to the Sisters of Bon Secours. Also for myself, it was a great gift to be able to attend a retreat and share the faith of the volunteers.

**What is your hope for young adults who are considering a year with BSVM?** We are very passionate about this work and hope to share with another Bon Secours Ministry Volunteer how end-of-life care fits into health care. We'd love to show them how hospice is a team of equals. A team that includes: doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, aides and volunteers. We'd love to help young adults see the "being" of health care.

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6 | Alumni Profile: Alex Meyer



*Alex and his family*

**What were some of the gifts you received during your time of service? How have these gifts helped you now?** I was blessed during my time in BSVM. The community created with my fellow volunteers was invaluable. Although I don't see or speak with them with as much as I would like, each of them is still dear to me. The gift of living simply is one I am still thankful for. It has given me a lens on how I view money, possessions, and materials that removes a lot of the anxiety and strife related with these.



*Alex and his 2008-2009 BSVM community*



**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

Volunteers on a walking history tour in Richmond, VA. Photo credit: Emily Thrush, B SVM Site Manager.

### 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

## COMING SOON

Later this year, B SVM will switch from mailing *The Companion* to delivering it electronically.



To ensure that you continue to receive our newsletter, please scan the QR code and provide us with your preferred email address.

*Thank you for staying connected with us!*



### 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.*

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