



# BON SECOURS BEACON

*The newsletter of the Volunteer Ministry Program*

Summer, 2009

Issue 8

## Diving Into Life as a Bon Secours Volunteer

By: Shannon Curran, Director

It is with good reason that this edition of the Beacon is a few seasons behind schedule. Since the 2008-2009 Bon Secours Volunteers arrived last August, our lives have been full of life-giving experiences.

On the second day of orientation, I took the volunteers on a walking tour of downtown Baltimore. With boundless energy, they tackled the steps of Federal Hill, trucked it to the Washington Monument, and, in a hunt for the perfect lunch, hit every stall in Lexington Market. Their energy was limited to neither their feet nor their appetites.



2008-2009 Volunteers  
Allison, Alicia, Alex, Jonathan, and Crystal

Throughout the tour, their looks of curiosity and thoughtful questions about life in Baltimore suggested that they were ready to dive into life as a Bon Secours Volunteer. As the year really is a time to be immersed in service and to learn through one's experiences, diving in is the perfect way to begin. Because they approached the tour in such an inquisitive manner and were genuinely interested in learning as much about life in Baltimore as possible, it was clear that they were not diving in head first.

For five individuals who had just arrived to a completely new city, new house, new roommates, new work site, and new way of living, it would be easy to simply dive in head first without thinking or to withdraw into one's self by holding tight in a cannon ball position. Questions about housing

development and gentrification, safety and violence, schools, hunger, the availability of work, and access to health care clarified that these five individuals had been preparing and polishing their dives long before they arrived.

### **...a time to be immersed in service and to learn through one's experiences...**

Just as they arrived poised to enter fully into the experiences this year holds for them, over the past ten months the volunteers have continued to dive more deeply into examining the connections between service, spirituality, and justice present in these experiences. In this edition, we hope that the reflections from Allison and Alicia provide you with the opportunity to dive with them into the questions and connections which appear in the wake of service.

## The 'Marquettters'

By: Jonathan Bettle, current volunteer  
Jonathan is a graduate of the University of Dayton.

*For the past several years, Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry has hosted students from Marquette University for a spring break outreach trip. The students are pictured below.*



This past March, six Marquette University students traveled for thirteen hours to Baltimore to live with the Bon Secours Volunteers and to be of service to the West Baltimore community. *Continued on page four.*

## Simple Gifts

Reflection by: Allison Bombard, current volunteer  
Allison is a graduate of Sacred Heart University.

My year as a Bon Secours Volunteer has been a whirlwind of emotions and opportunities. As this year of service comes to an end, it is difficult to process all I have felt, seen, learned, and experienced. However, I know I have come away with much more than I could ever have imagined. At the Bon Secours Family Support Center, I planned on utilizing my social work skills doing case management and counseling when the opportunity arose. However, God had other plans for me at my volunteer site.

When I arrived at the Family Support Center, they had been without a Program Director for several months as well as a Child Development Specialist (the supervisor of the Child Development room). Clearly, this was a huge time of transition for the Center. Before arriving in Baltimore, I was thinking of this year as a time where I could experience clinical social work to see if it was really what I wanted to do as a profession.

In the beginning, I was placed in the Child Development room helping the two staff members with preparing for the day, watching the infants and toddlers during the day, and cleaning up after the children left. Like many people, I have a special place in my heart for children. In fact, just thinking of the children I work with puts a smile on my face. However, our attendance numbers were low and I felt I could be much more useful in a different capacity.



Allison and Shakaya

I was prepared to do social work, *real* case work. I kept feeling like there was not enough for me to do and, because the Center was focused on many important things, they did not have anyone to delegate assignments to me. I wanted to be kept busy, to be put to work. I soon realized that I was losing sight of why I was here. I did not come to Baltimore for my own benefit. I came to the conclusion that I had to slow down, do all that I could do, and, perhaps, just being present was enough.

By humbling myself, I soon saw that I was not just here to help the community, the mothers and their children, but I was there to serve my co-workers as well. I saw that my calmness and presence made them less stressed. The small things I was able to do for my co-workers, like attending to the children while they prepared snack, really made a difference to their stress level and how they handled situations.

**...perhaps, just being present was enough.**

A few months in, I was given the rare privilege to switch my volunteer site to the Social Work Department at the hospital. They were short staffed and could really use my help in any way I could offer. This was the opportunity I was looking for, right?

But somehow, I didn't feel right about leaving the Family Support Center. I was starting to see God's grace around me. I began to see the one mother who says "Thank You" and the student who comes everyday despite being picked on by the other mothers differently. I did not just *see* the potential of the Center, but I felt *hope* for each mother and child that walked through the door. I realized that conversations with the mothers, even in the short time they were in and out of the Child Development room, could make a difference in the way they saw things, too.

At this time, I cannot possibly know all the ways my time at the Family Support Center has affected me, but I do know that the smallest things are the ones that make the most difference. No one cares that I have a degree or a high GPA. Those things don't matter the slightest bit when you are serving God. If I have learned only one thing it is to not always want to do more or to feel like I should be doing more, but to be content with what God is asking of me in the moment, as simple as it may seem...because small things go a long way.

*"In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."*

~Mother Theresa~

## Alumni Corner

By: Marie Truffer

### Bon Secours Volunteers Celebrate the Sisters Academy's First Graduation

In June 2008, the Sisters Academy held their first graduation. Each Bon Secours Volunteer who has served at the Sisters Academy since its opening in 2004 was present for this momentous occasion. Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry was represented by former volunteers Sarah Gillis, Lexy Janda, and Beth Wood (now employed at SAB) as well as 2008 volunteer Cassie Seward, former director, Eileen Kiefer and current director, Shannon Curran.

[Sarah Gillis \(2004-2005 volunteer\)](#) shared her thoughts about the graduation:

“Attending the Sisters Academy’s graduation was an extremely moving event for me. Looking back on where I had been during the past three years, and then considering how much these little girls must have changed was surreal. It wasn’t until I heard a sweetly familiar voice yell, “Miss Sarah Anne!” that I could be sure these young women in front of me were the little 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls I had once taught. In front of me was a group of poised, confident and strong young women that were ready to conquer the world. And then I remembered, that’s exactly how they’d looked when I left them almost three years earlier (only a little smaller)! I’d like to think I had a little something to do with that, but in reality there was nothing I gave them compared to the gifts they bestowed on me during that one year I spent with all of them. Furthermore, were it not for the wonderfully kind, empathetic, and strong sisters that I had to learn from, I am certain I would not be the therapist I am today.” *Sarah is currently studying for her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at the University of Wisconsin.*



[Shannon, Cassie, Beth, Lexy, Eileen, and Sarah](#)

[Lexy Janda \(2005-2006 volunteer\)](#) stated: “I wouldn’t trade my year at Sisters Academy for anything! It wasn’t always easy; the students are tough! But that is why they were chosen, because they all possess the tenacity that they need to succeed. Those girls taught me so much about myself; stuff I didn’t know that I didn’t know. They taught me what it means to truly appreciate what I have and the blessings that are in my life. I think all the “Sisters” at Sisters Academy are blessings to this world. They are all going to go places and make differences in this world, big and small. I was so happy that I could come back for the graduation. It was amazing to see the girls again. I am so proud of each and every one of them and all that they have overcome. They are an inspiration. I pray for each of them that they continue to succeed and make it to college.” *Lexy is working on her Masters in Higher Education Administration at the University of Maryland.*



[Lexy with a former student.](#)



[Eileen and Sarah](#)

[Eileen Kiefer \(founding director\)](#) recognized the overall importance of our volunteer program and its association with the Sisters Academy, writing, “As I watched Sarah and Lexy talk to the girls and pay attention to the ceremony, I could see the pride and happiness they felt for their former students. I too felt the same way, not only for the students, but for Sarah and Lexy. Their experience as Bon Secours Volunteers encouraged them to continue on with their studies which will allow them to pursue helping others. But the experience also impacted Sarah and Lexy in personal ways that brought them back to Baltimore to be there for their former students as they celebrated their accomplishments.”

## 2007-2008 Volunteers: Where Are They Now?

By: Marie Truffer

**Stephanie Kern** is attending Rutgers University where she is studying for her Master's Degree in English. She is taking Jane Austen, Shakespeare, and Intro to Graduate Literary Study which is a full schedule, but she also has a full-time job working for Catholic Charities. Although Stephanie has another year of studies, she will begin researching PhD programs this summer.

**Amber Hamilton** returned to California. Amber has followed through with her love of the Emergency Room by taking courses and becoming an ER scribe. Amber is planning on applying for medical school.

**Nicole Terrio Ernst** married Ryan Ernst in July 2008. Ryan is in the Air Force and stationed in San Antonio, Texas. Being from Minnesota, Nicole was surprised at how much she loves living in Texas. She has made many friends among the other military wives. However, she admits she is really looking forward to moving back to Minnesota when Ryan leaves the Air Force. *Continued on page 5.*



Cassie, Nicole, Stephanie, and Amber

## The 'Marquettters'

*Continued from page one.*

Although they were only here for a week, we were struck by each student's individual ambitions, kind hearts, and fun attitudes.

Throughout that week, the students visited and served at our Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry placement sites. From researching public health agencies which could provide follow-up care for Emergency Department patients, to organizing supplies for the Cardiology Department's health fairs, to assisting students at the Sisters Academy with designing and assembling tetrahedral kites, to rolling new color on the walls of the Bon Secours Family Support Center's kitchen, to joining one of the Tele-Heart Program's Silver Seniors nutrition classes — we tried to make their week in Baltimore worth the trip!

In addition, the 'Marquettters' helped in the clean up and construction of new homes through Sandtown Habitat for Humanity and back at the Poppleton Street residence, the St. Peter's Adult Learning Center put their energy to good use with insulating the kitchen.

Yet, their experiences were not all dirty and labor intensive. Time was spent eating together and sharing stories of what brought our current group of Bon Secours Volunteers to Baltimore. Many issues relating to poverty, justice, the Gospel, and our duties as Christians were discussed, with episodes of *The Wire* serving as the context of the struggles of West Baltimoreans. One night we all escaped to Washington, DC to participate in dinner and discussion with friends of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry. Adam Taylor of *Sojourners* magazine and participants of the Discipleship Year volunteer program welcomed these fellow members of the Body of Christ into their purview.

The requisite tour of Baltimore and Mass at Transfiguration parish in Pigtown gave us all a chance to witness the beauty that is within a people in a forgotten city. Joy and laughter eked out during the "Chick-A-Flicka" game, the Bon Secours' version of charades and Taboo. As the Bon Secours Volunteers went to bed, the Marquette students gathered in the Reflection Room of the Poppleton Street residence, sharing their stories of what they had witnessed that day.

In the course of six days, the six undergrads participated in our community life and we wish these young adults blessed direction as they pursue Christ's calling in their lives.

## Learning from My Sisters

Reflection by: Alicia Manteiga, current volunteer  
Alicia is a graduate of the University of Florida.

“Father.”  
“No, Favuh.”  
“But it’s spelled F-A-T-H-E-R!”  
“Yes, but in Ballmore (*Baltimore*) we say Favuh.”  
“Okay. Well, then, I talked with my Favuh today.”  
“Miss Manteiga, you’re hilarious.”  
“I know.”

As a Bon Secours Volunteer, I came to Baltimore expecting to provide good help to people who needed it. Help seemed to be in high demand, and I knew I would be changed and formed through interactions with people I helped. In my arrogance, I did not anticipate the sizeable impact that the *bon secours* or *good help* of others would leave on me.

My first experience at 13 South Poppleton Street, the volunteer home, consisted of my community members jumping to carry my admittedly heavy luggage up two flights of narrow stairs. My first week in Baltimore was peppered with introductions to and conversations with amazing people — nurses and nuns, social workers and advocates, people who officially and unofficially devoted their lives to serving others. The first month in Baltimore was filled with invitations and donations from strangers and new acquaintances, people I hardly knew, but people who decided I was worth their generosity.

Currently, the word “generosity” evokes the image of the Sisters Academy of Baltimore. I have never worked in an environment in which my co-workers and supervisors work so hard to provide some of the best kinds of help, a solid education and the affirmation of human dignity.

The sacrifices my co-workers have enthusiastically made in order to help others reach their potential are both humbling and inspiring. Their hard work has resulted in a special type of school spirit. The spirit of the school, of mutual support and sisterhood, is so pervasive that I found myself on the receiving end of the best *secours* I could imagine — help from a student.

As we were waiting for her ride to come pick her up, she began teaching me how to act like I had lived in Baltimore for awhile. It struck me: How much help am I going to give and how much more have I already been given?

Any help I offer is the direct result of help I have already received and the path my life takes will be shaped by the inspirational stories and examples of *good help* provided by my community, my co-workers, and my students.



Alicia with Maria, Molly, and Dayona, members of the science club.

### From the Director:



**Moira Curran Capista** arrived on 11.23.08. She has agreed to join the 2029-2030 volunteer community!

### 2007-2008 Volunteers: Where Are They Now?

*Continued from page four.*

**Cassie Seward** is currently teaching at the Sisters Academy, her former volunteer site. Cassie stated, “I’m very grateful for my experience as a Bon Secours volunteer and that I was able to stay on as a full-time employee at the school. Teaching at Sisters Academy has been a great experience for me, where I have grown both as a person and as a teacher.” Hoping to continue to pursue public interest work, Cassie will be attending Law School this Fall.

**Hannah Tripp** is moving back from Washington and will be attending the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine. Hannah states, “My goal, at this point, is to become a family practice doctor who specializes in maternity care and natural birth. I hope to develop a practice with other doctors and midwives and work to support home birth and freestanding birth clinics, especially in rural communities like the one I grew up in.”



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BSVM Volunteer 1999-2000

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**Support Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry**

**Share your time and enthusiasm.** Your personal presence is one of the best ways to support the program. Please consider sending a letter of support and interest, an invitation for site-seeing in Baltimore, or an invitation to dinner with your family.

**Offer your hands.** We are currently organizing a Summer cleaning at the volunteer residence (13 S. Poppleton St.). If you are interested in assisting with this work, please contact the office at 410.442.3161.

**Spread the word.** Tell your friends, neighbors, and co-workers about the Volunteer Ministry Program. Perhaps you know someone who would like to apply to become a BSVM volunteer.

**Partner with us.** Become a ministry site for a full-time volunteer. Contact the office at 410-442-3161 for more information.

**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. In addition, we are trying to make some improvements to the volunteer residence. Monetary donations for paint and gently used furnishings for the living room are greatly appreciated.

**Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent directly to:**

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry Program,  
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