In 2009, BVS had...

- 50 new volunteers
- 4 orientation units
- 119 volunteers total

Currently, BVS has...

- volunteers in 9 different countries
- volunteers in 20 different US states and Washington, D.C.
- volunteers from age 19 to 77

BVS Orientation on the Move

Before each volunteer heads off to a project, the project year starts off with a three-week orientation. Historically, orientations have been anchored at the New Windsor Conference Center in New Windsor, MD. Throughout the decades, though, orientations have been known to move out on the road. In fact, as an incoming volunteer in 2003, orientation coordinator Callie Surber had her orientation at the Genesis Church of the Brethren in Putney, VT. For the past three years, BVS orientation has been on the road at least once a year.

BVS was in Peace Valley and Kansas City, MO in 2007. BVS was hosted in Wenatchee and Seattle, WA, by local Church of the Brethren congregations in 2008. In 2009, the summer orientation was in Harrisonburg, VA. The group had such a positive experience that BVS will return in July, 2010. This fall, BVS will try a new venue at Camp Myrtlewood in Myrtle Point, OR, with the Portland Peace Church of the Brethren hosting us for the final week of orientation.
Community Houses Take Root

Last year, BVS embarked on a new venture: intentional community living opportunities for volunteers. Partnering with Church of the Brethren congregations, we're inviting volunteers to consider making community living a part of their year of service – not only serving at a project site but also working at building relationships in local neighborhoods and paying special attention to living together in community. In October 2009, our first BVS House opened in partnership with the Cincinnati (Ohio) Church of the Brethren. Four volunteers moved into a house just a block away from the congregation's building in the transitioning Walnut Hills neighborhood, and have spent the last nine months serving the community there and spending time together in spiritual formation and community building. The Cincinnati volunteers have chronicled their year in community on their blog, www.walnuthillshappenings.blogspot.com.

The community living experiment has generated quite a bit of excitement among Brethren congregations, new BVS volunteers, and the BVS staff. The Cincinnati volunteers will finish their year there this fall, and BVS plans to continue the partnership with the Cincinnati congregation by sending new volunteers and establishing roots so that this community house might become a long-term fixture of the BVS program. We've also been in conversation with several other congregations around the country, and hope to start a second community house this fall in Portland, Oregon.

If you're interested in becoming a part of a community house, or if your congregation might be interested in partnering with BVS to create one, contact Dana Cassell, BVS staff for Vocation and Community Living, at dcassell@brethren.org.

New projects in BVS over the past year include: Just Neighbors in Falls Church, VA; Small Steps and MCC in Bosnia-Herzegovina; East Belfast Mission in Northern Ireland; Sanctuary of Hope in Kansas City, KS; Brethren Community Services in Springfield, OR; The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program in Washington, DC; Church and Peace in Schöffengrund, Germany.

Grace Lefever has been named the recipient of BVS's 2010 Partners in Service Award. The award recognizes an individual, project, or congregation that has demonstrated exceptional commitment in partnering with BVS to share God's love through acts of service.

Grace Lefever has been a strong advocate for Christian service ever since she herself was a BVSer in the 12th unit in September, 1951. She served in Fresno, California before joining the BVS training staff for many years. Thirteen years ago BVS orientations began going to Grace's organic farm and grocery store, Sonnewald, outside of York, PA. Grace takes groups on a weed walk and introduces the unit to her famous green drink and all manner of healthy living and eating. She embraces every volunteer and welcomes them into her family. BVSers eat the healthiest lunch they will get all year. BVS is pleased to recognize Grace for her commitment to service.