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A Year of Living Differently

This year's orientations:

- Summer Unit #333
August 1-9, 2023
Inspiration Hills Camp
Burbank, Ohio
- Fall Unit #334
Sept. 26-Oct. 4, 2023
Camp Koinonia
Cle Elum, Washington

By the numbers:

- Active volunteers: 27
18 in the United States
3 in Europe
1 in Latin America
4 in Asia
1 in Africa
- Active projects: 55
37 in the United States
7 in Europe
5 in Latin America
2 in Asia
4 in Africa

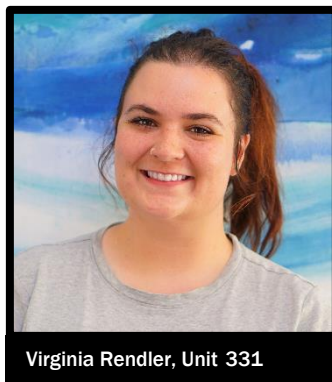
*Note: Not all active projects are accepting volunteers at any given time.

The contributions in this biannual newsletter come from current and former BVS volunteers. We hope it gives you a glimpse into their experiences as they share about their BVS service and their journeys of faith and life. For more regular updates, sign up for BVS' monthly e-newsletter at www.brethren.org.

The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

BVS CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF SERVING THE WORLD!



Virginia Rendler, Unit 331

Strengthened by Northern Ireland by Virginia Rendler

I have been volunteering through Brethren Volunteer Service at the Corrymeela Community in Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, since September 2022. It has

been an incredibly fulfilling experience.

Corrymeela is a place that brings groups of all kinds together for education, training, teambuilding, and peacemaking. I work with a team of wonderful volunteers, staff, and community members who are dedicated to creating a welcoming environment where important work can be done.

With my time here coming to an end, I have found myself reflecting on what I will be bringing home with me, both personally and professionally. I have learned so much about the history of Northern Ireland, what it means to live in a community affected by violence, and how to hold a space that meets diverse needs.

The connections with others are what stand out to me most, whether in time spent playing team-building games with primary school students, facilitating reflective space for university students, or sitting in on sessions with local politicians.

I have developed confidence in my own ability to create and deliver a successful program, and I have



Virginia with members of the Corrymeela volunteer team

tried to empower those who visit the site to feel at home and confident enough to bring their experience back to their local communities.

I'm so grateful for this opportunity, and I'm looking forward to moving into the next phase of my life bolstered by the experiences I've had here in Northern Ireland.

Virginia was hired as interim volunteer coordinator for BVS beginning July 17, working as a remote employee from North Manchester, Ind. She is a 2020 graduate of Manchester University with a bachelor's degree in peace studies and philosophy, with a minor in religious studies.



Martie Hummer, Unit 331

Aren't you a little old? by Martie Hummer

"Aren't you a little old?"

I was asked this question at supper shortly after I settled into my project at Brethren

Disaster Ministries. Before I had a chance to answer, the other volunteers at my table answered for me: "No."

My name is Martha Hummer. Most people call me "Martie." I am a 76-year-old Brethren Volunteer Service volunteer. I became a volunteer in August of 2022 partly because my life was in a state of confusion and major change and partly because I felt called to do more with my life. I felt an urgency to do it now.

I have often been asked if I like what I am doing, and would I do it again? My answer: Yes, in a heartbeat. I have learned new skills and tricks both on the job site and in the kitchen from skilled construction leaders and experienced cooks.

One lesson I have learned is to adapt to change: new volunteers weekly, new household leaders and construction leaders every three to four weeks, a new site in a different state, and a different church. You would have thought I would

have learned that lesson in my previous life as a farm wife and 28 years as an LPN—and I did to a point. In BVS, though, it became a skill as opposed to an experience.

The very best part of BVS for me was the people: the young people in my unit 331 who treated me like one of them, the volunteers from all over the country, leaders who gave their time unselfishly and repeatedly, and the homeowners we served who shared their stories and gratitude. There were precious new friends whom I may never see again in person but will never forget.

My family and home church (Annville Church of the Brethren in Pennsylvania) have provided support with texts, calls, many cards, and special packages, as well as a touching video from my church with our little ones saying "Hi Martie" and singing. How can I ever forget such a loving tribute to me, the volunteer. Wow!

I think my age helps me appreciate BVS and all life has to offer. So aren't I a little old? Not at all.





Chandler Poling, Unit 204

New relationships and a new heart

by Chandler Poling

After graduation from high school, I decided to enter Brethren Volunteer Service. I spent a year (1992-1993) at San Antonio Catholic Worker House, an intentional community that provided hospitality to families and individuals who needed a place to live or a hot meal.

On weekdays, we cooked a hot lunch and served it to roughly 50 people. We offered four rooms for families

who needed a temporary place to live. We met basic needs, but the real aim of the work was solidarity. Families and workers lived in the same house, prayed, and ate meals together. Our guests were sometimes grateful and cooperative, sometimes manipulative or aggressive. Some were mothers fleeing a violent husband. Some, with breath smelling of alcohol, came every day for lunch before returning to their spot under the bridge. The abstract idea of “the homeless” was no longer meaningful to me as I built relationships with real human beings: Cowboy, Katharine, Juan, and others.

When I was a child, my family never missed a meal or worried about where we would sleep that night. I never feared that dad or mom would come home drunk or stay out late. I never feared violence or verbal abuse. I never realized that life could be any different for other people.

Those of us who have all our needs met face a temptation when thinking about people who are “poor,” “homeless,” or “mentally ill.” We may be tempted to blame them for their situation, or dismiss them as “bums.” On the other hand, we might romanticize them as victims, and offer condescending charity. Both responses dismiss the full humanity of our struggling brothers and sisters. The “poor” are not all the same. Each is a human person made in the image and likeness of God, worthy of love, yet vulnerable to the same frailties as all of us.

BVS allowed me to build relationships with people I never would have met, and this changed my heart, making me more aware of the value of each person. As Jesus said: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” When we listen and share our lives with those who are in need, we encounter Jesus, and our hearts are transformed.

Chandler Poling lives in Vermont with his wife, Stefanie, and three children: Elias, Mariam, and John. He teaches music and works in a non-profit whose goal is to end homelessness.



Chris Stover-Brown, Unit 210

Four years of firsts

by Chris Stover-Brown

In many ways, BVS opened up the world to me. It was a time of many firsts!

I was traveling making videos of different BVS sites. With Pesticide Action Network in San Francisco, I saw vast strawberry fields for the first time and saw berries dripping with pesticide. Plus, I saw growing artichokes (and ate fresh ones!) for the first time, too.

With the National Farm Worker Ministry, in Sacramento, California, I had blanched fresh asparagus for the first time. In Atlanta,

Georgia, I ate in a restaurant with fresh flowers on the table for the first time: at Café 458’s restaurant for homeless persons. For supper that night, my taste buds exploded with my first taste of fresh basil pesto in their volunteer community.

After I videotaped prisoners having a run-a-thon organized by CentrePeace in State College, Pennsylvania, I ate Korean food for the first time, and it was so hot I had to dip my broccoli in my ice water to rinse off the spice. I ate Indian curry for the first time at Trees For Life in Wichita, Kansas. Then, I traveled outside the United States for the first time with Trees For Life and I ate many more curry dishes in India. My first time driving a stick shift was our volunteer community car in Wichita.

And everywhere I went during my four years in BVS, I met many other dedicated volunteers at the many BVS sites I visited.

The Volunteer is published by Brethren Volunteer Service.
 BVS is a ministry of the Church of the Brethren •
 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 • 800-323-8039 •
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Overcoming boundaries

by Marvin Blenkle



Marvin Blenkle, Unit 330

When my parents were my age, they could not have been at the place where I am now.

Growing up in East Germany under occupation of the Soviet Union, my parents were not blessed with the same privileges that I have today. I am part of the first generation of my family that grew up in a free, independent, and prosperous community. As part of that community, I find myself bound to uphold the values that enabled me to come here and serve in the United States.

I have come to the realization that it is now my responsibility to secure the promise of those values. Without the dedication of others to this cause, I would not be able to be where I am now. Not everyone is able to travel abroad, explore new cultures, and stand up for their values. Therefore, I perceive my service as a privilege.

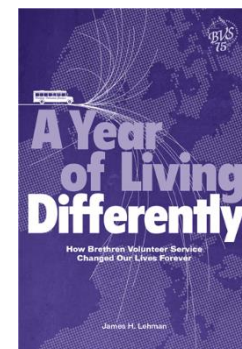
Peace has been the foundation for so much more than the values we benefit from. For me, peace means keeping up your composure while being in the midst of chaos. Countering the challenges of life with ease and comfort has been the biggest gift I earned throughout my service.

I hope everyone will see the importance of ensuring those possibilities for others in the future, as well. To do my part in that, I will continue to serve our communities with kindness, compassion, and all the virtues I discovered throughout my year of service, to keep overcoming the boundaries that still lie ahead of us.

Marvin Blenkle is from Berlin, Germany, and served at Abode Services in Fremont, California.

75 years and still going strong

Brethren Volunteer Service officially began in 1948, after young adults brought a passionate request to the denomination’s Annual Conference. Seventy-five years later, it’s still going strong, with almost 30 volunteers serving across the country and around the world.



A new anniversary book from Brethren Press, compiled by Brethren author Jim Lehman, tells the story of the people, places, and events that were part of that extraordinary journey. Titled *A Year of Living Differently*, it is available for just \$19.48 at www.brethrenpress.com or by calling 800-441-3712. (For overseas customers, email brethrenpress@brethren.org.)