



The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

BVS CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF SERVING THE WORLD!

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Staff report

This year's orientations:

- Unit #335
Second half of July 2024
Details to be determined
- Unit #336
Mid-September 2024
Details to be determined

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: 57
37 in the United States
8 in Europe
6 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 <https://www.brethren.org/bvs/updates>. For BVS books, mugs, and more, visit brethrenpress.com.

Two new units go to serve

Orientation units 333 and 334 took place this past summer and fall, bringing together 22 volunteers for training and preparation for service.

Unit 333, held Aug. 1-9 at Inspiration Hills Camp in Burbank, Ohio, included 13 volunteers from the US and Germany. The six German volunteers came from EIRENE, BVS' long-time partner organization in Germany. Four came from Church of the Brethren congregations.

Unit 334 brought nine volunteers together from the US, Canada, and Germany Sept. 26-Oct. 4 at Camp Koinonia in Cle Elum, Wash. Six of the nine came via EIRENE. Two were connected to Church of the Brethren congregations.

Those volunteers are now serving at projects in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, Washington D.C., Japan, Northern Ireland, and Ecuador. Those include Church of the Brethren-related projects at Camp Mardela, San Diego Church of the Brethren, and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, as well as Fundación Brethren y Unida in Quito.

Please hold them in prayer as they serve this year. The next BVS orientation units will occur in summer and fall 2024. Check online for updates.



BVS Unit 333, top, had orientation at Inspiration Hills Camp in Ohio, while Unit 334 held theirs at Camp Koinonia in Washington.



Anna Schweitzer, Unit 333

One month at a time by Anna Schweitzer

Two months. Wow. It's hard to believe that I've been in BVS for that long.

Two months away from my family. Two months in an entirely new environment.

Two months of constantly meeting new people. Introducing and reintroducing myself to all those I shake hands with. Two months learning how to budget my money. Two months of deciding what I want for dinner. (Should I really have Pop Tarts?)

Two months spent in more prayer than at any previous time in my life. Two months of excitement and boredom. Sometimes wishing the clock would just slow down and other afternoons spent watching the minutes drag on.

Two months of being welcomed into an amazing church family. Small group and potlucks and church retreat and invitations for dinner. I am so grateful to have found such wonderful people.

Two months of FaceTiming my friends from home and waiting for the day when I can hug them again. Two months of receiving care packages and cards from those who love me. It means so, so much and I don't know that I can ever truly express how much it means.

Two months of serving. Two months of doing whatever is asked of me. Never knowing what is truly in store for each day. Will I call an ambulance or help someone fill out a job application?

Two months of laughing and crying. Two months of separation from the old and connection to the new. Two months of growing, changing, and adapting.

Two months down. Ten to go.

Anna Schweitzer is from Richmond, Ind. She is serving in Baltimore at Project PLASE, an organization that provides housing and other services for those who are homeless. She wrote this reflection in October at the two-month point of her service placement.

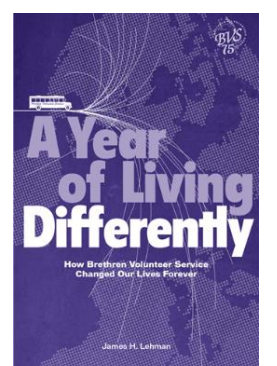


Jonas Baron, Unit 333
Camp Mardela, Denton, Md.

A FLURRY OF FIRSTS

"I had a lot of firsts this past month. My first Family Camp, which was awesome, the kitchen ROCKS. My first Camp Supper, which was great and delicious. Also I had my first pumpkin roll, VERY tasty. While talking about food, I had my first crabs (and crab feast), too. ... I also joined Easton Church of the Brethren's Peachblossom Bells, it's a lot of fun."

BUY THE NEW BOOK!





Grace Elliott, Unit 331

Living in 'The Land of Eternal Spring'

by Grace Elliott

Many stereotypes exist in the minds of Americans and other Westerners about the climate of the African continent. It is a commonly held belief that Africa is either a sweltering, steamy jungle or a parched, barren, desert land, complete with the sight of camels strutting on the far horizon.

But northwestern Rwanda fits neither of these. While it is located just one degree south of the equator, northwest Rwanda sits at an elevation of anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level, with a few mountaintops more than 14,000 feet. As an equatorial highland climate, it averages a daily high of 75 degrees Fahrenheit

and dips into the 60's at night year-round. There is a consistent dawn to dusk from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. throughout the year.

Four seasons plan out the lives of a mostly agrarian society: long rainy season, long dry season, followed by a short rainy season and a short dry season. Being able to eat locally grown fresh fruit and vegetables during the time of winter in the US, or going swimming in the lake in January seems strange, but it's not hard to get accustomed to!

Rwanda bears the nicknames "The Land of a Thousand Hills" and "The Land of Eternal Spring." With lush green mountains and fields of tea and banana plantations stretching as far as the eye can see, it is so beautiful that it can only be appreciated when one sees it with their own eyes.

This is Rwanda, a land of great contrast. There is poverty, but there is hope. There is sadness in the shadow of war in the past and on the horizon in the hills of Congo, but there is peace in surrender to King Jesus, the one who sets his people free. It is the Land of a Thousand Hills, and the land of a thousand smiles and laughs. The children cheerfully chasing each other around attired in worn footie pajamas or tattered ballerina outfits prove the resilience of the young. Life is hard, hunger is a constant companion, war looms on the horizon, in a fight for survival.

But there is joy in the blessing of another day, thankfulness in eating food today, and the peace of a life surrendered to Christ, the satisfaction of the filling of the Holy Spirit. This is Rwanda. This is my home. My growth as a person in the past year has been exponential. Africa has produced many strong women. I am one of them. I am a daughter of the Land of Eternal Spring. *Imana ishimwe* (To God be the glory)!

Grace Elliott is serving through BVS at Brethren Nursery School in Ginsenyi, Rwanda.

SERVE SHORT-TERM! FAITHX 2024

In addition to longer-term volunteer opportunities



around the world, BVS each year also offers FaithX: a full slate of short-term service trips for all ages.

In 2024, FaithX begins with an older adult trip to Camp Ithiel near Orlando, Fla., Feb. 25 to March 1, then follows that with summer adventures for junior and senior high youth, young adults, and families.

That summer roster includes two trips for junior high youth, four for junior and senior high combined, two for senior high, two for adults (one domestic and one international), the "We Are Able" trip for youth and young adults with intellectual disabilities, and a new intergenerational family FaithX event for all ages, with childcare provided for younger children.

The full FaithX schedule (registration opens Jan. 10):

- Feb. 25-March 1:** Older adult trip, Gotha, Fla.
- June 1-10:** Adult international, Ecuador
- June 8-14:** Senior high, Cle Elum, Wash. (Camp Koinonia)
- June 9-14:** Junior/senior high, Denton, Md. (Camp Mardela)
- June 18-23:** Junior/senior high, South Bend, Ind.
- June 19-23:** Junior high, Roanoke, Va.
- June 23-27:** All ages family week, Petersburg, Pa. (Camp Blue Diamond)
- June 24-27:** "We Are Able," Elgin, Ill.
- July 14-20:** Senior high, North Fort Myers, Fla.
- July 17-21:** Junior high, Palmyra, Pa.
- July 21-26:** Junior/senior high, Knoxville, Tenn.
- July 28-Aug. 2:** Junior/senior high, Winston-Salem, NC
- July 28-Aug. 3:** Adult domestic, Eastern US (Brethren Disaster Ministries, exact site to be determined)

From Ecuador onward: BVS prepared me for a lifetime by Jim Gibbel, Unit 50

After graduation from Juniata College in 1960, I chose Brethren Volunteer Service as my alternative to military service. Why? That's what my church, Lititz (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, taught me!

The two-month BVS training at New Windsor, Maryland, was a thorough preparation for service, peace, and community—not for a BVS term, but for a *lifetime*. I remember that emphasis stressed by Dan West, a Brethren leader with us for one whole week of training.

Because my mother was not well, and my father had died in 1959, I wanted to serve somewhere not far from home. Instead, I was called to Ecuador! Henry Long, Foreign Missions staff of the Church of the Brethren, visited me and encouraged me to go.

In July 1961, I began my BVS project in Llano Grande, Ecuador, an indigenous community located half an hour north of Quito, the capital, where the Brethren Mission office was located.

For two months I lived with a family in Quito to learn Spanish. After that my home was a simple, small house near the missionaries in Llano Grande, with water and toilet outside. I always joined missionary families for evening meals on a rotating basis. That was interesting!



Volunteers share BVS stories at Brethren Village in Lititz, Pa.

I was treasurer/business manager of the Brethren Mission, consisting of five or six families and individuals involved in education, medical work, agriculture, raising chickens, and evangelism/church.

I'd go for supplies, take care of mail, shipment details, business matters; I'd transport students by truck back and forth every day to Quito for high school (as the Brethren school in Llano Grande was elementary only); I helped market poultry as that business developed; I helped build the church building with adobe blocks; and I generally participated in the life of the community, the church, and youth activities.

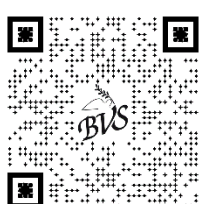
Living with these folks for two years, I felt a part of them! At my farewell celebration, the youth of the church presented me with a painting of

Cotopaxi, the second highest peak in Ecuador. It had been done by a local artist, H. Moncaya, with signatures of the youth on the back.

What did I take away from my time in BVS?

- I learned Spanish!
- I treasure lasting friendships with many missionaries.
- Friendships and visits with wonderful people in my community of Llano Grande, including some who visited us in Lititz, and we visited them in 1994 and again in 2006.
- My limited view of life was changed immensely. I gained a deep appreciation and respect for other cultures and peoples, and for new experiences in this amazing world.
- I gained a love of travel: I traveled alone in Peru and Chile one Easter, and at the end of my service in 1963, my brother John and I traveled home overland through Central America by public transportation. A great adventure! After Ecuador, I never stopped traveling until several years ago.
- And since my assignment was with Brethren Mission, my love and dedication to the Church of the Brethren grew and continued my whole life.

After BVS, Jim Gibbel was a long-time insurance agency manager, now retired. He and his wife, Elaine, live at Brethren Village in Lititz, Pa.



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