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This year's orientations:

- Unit #335  
July 28-Aug. 5, 2024  
Camp Colorado, Sedalia, Colo.
- Unit #336  
Sept. 17-25, 2024  
Camp Brethren Heights,  
Rodney, Mich.

By the numbers:

- Active volunteers: 25  
19 in the United States  
2 in Europe  
3 in Asia  
1 in Africa
- Active projects: 59  
38 in the United States  
8 in Europe  
6 in Latin America  
3 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](http://brethrenpress.com).

# The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

Making a difference one volunteer at a time

## A life turned upside-down

by Cornelius Raff, Unit 333



Cornelius Raff, Unit 333

Suddenly, I find myself in a meeting with the deputy secretary of USAID, in a roundtable discussion with US State Department staff, or talking to the former German Minister of the Environment. Being a BVS volunteer in Washington, D.C., has pretty much turned my life upside-down, as I'm now working with fairly experienced policy advocates while also living in a house with nine other housemates from different countries with different experiences.

I have always been interested in politics, especially in climate policy, and have occasionally been involved in protests and supported a few organizations that I thought were doing the right thing. However, I was never really involved in more direct advocacy because of my limited willingness to actually commit to an organization or political party.

Therefore, I'm really grateful and glad to have found and been offered this opportunity, which is—and I'm sure will always be—a formative and lasting memory, especially because the right people were around me at the right time.

I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to take a gap year to join a volunteer program like BVS and serve for a year. I assure you that you won't regret it.



Cornelius Raff (standing at left in purple shirt) does a session with Church of the Brethren Christian Citizenship Seminar participants in Washington, D.C., in April alongside fellow BVSer Justice Westlake.

## A PLAYLIST FOR PEACE

As part of his volunteer work with the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Cornelius was recently asked to compile a playlist for *Messenger* magazine to accompany articles on the themes of peace and being anti-war. Here are some of his top picks:

- "No War," by Mutual Kumquat
- "Holiday," by Green Day
- "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)," by John Lennon and Yoko Ono
- "Goodnight Saigon," by Billy Joel
- "War," by Edwin Starr
- "99 Luftballons," by Nena
- "Waiting on the World to Change," by John Mayer

Cornelius Raff is from Mainz, Germany. He is serving with the Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in Washington, D.C.

## Of kale and community

by Kendall Brown



Kendall Brown, Unit 333

Hello! My name is Kendall, and I am the current BVSer with San Diego First Church of the Brethren. I have a variety of responsibilities at the Peace Campus there, and one of them is preparing for the Kale Festival.

When I first heard about the festival, I thought, "What an odd vegetable to have a festival for!" Stories were told about past festivals that included kale songs, kale snacks, kale for sale, and much more.

The planning was led by many different organizations, including the church. We talked about the booths, what food we would serve, and all the other details. The day of the festival was inspiring. I met new people, there was a large attendance, musicians playing, and different groups working together.

What stood out to me the most about this day was the community: Everyone working together, helping out, shaking hands, and sharing a meal.

The community at my placement has been the best part of my experience. Even though kale is not one of my favorite veggie choices, it will now always have a fond memory for me. The Kale Festival showed me how special this community is, and how important it is to keep at the center of what we do.



Kendall Brown, who is from Ann Arbor, Mich., serves up food—and community—at the San Diego Peace Campus in California.

## FAITHX IN FLORIDA!

Mark your calendars! Planning for FaithX short-term service opportunities in 2025 has already begun. The schedule will kick off with an older adult trip to Camp Ithiel near Orlando March 2-7. Watch for updates at [www.brethren.org/faithx](http://www.brethren.org/faithx).



**A leap of faith that's well worth the risk** *by Seth Spire*



Seth Spire, Unit 334

Over the years, I have discovered that I am largely a risk-averse person. My decision-making process is usually marked by selecting the path that is the most comfortable, familiar, and safe. Thus, the decision to move from a small town in Virginia to the big city of Portland, Oregon, to serve at SnowCap Community Charities in their food pantry was atypical, to say the least.

But I have absolutely loved the past half-year here in the Pacific Northwest and the opportunities to push myself out of my comfort zone as I learn about city life. I've explored downtown, joined sports leagues, mastered public transit, met tons of new people, and seen the good and bad of this place.

A significant portion of that learning has been in regards to the unfortunate and increasing problems of homelessness and food insecurity. Homeless camps are everywhere to be seen, and food pantries are seeing record highs in terms of people served: SnowCap is giving food to around 12,000 thousand people per month at the moment, with numbers likely to continue to increase.

The more I've seen what people are dealing with in the city, the less moving to Portland feels like a massive risk considering how large of a safety net I have in BVS, SnowCap, and my family. Our clients at SnowCap have lives full of risks and questions: *Where is the next meal from? Where can I sleep tonight? Is this food safe? Will the cops kick me out? Is there any way to get medical help?* The clients I've talked with have discussed these problems in such a nonchalant way, like how I'd talk about choosing a TV show to watch. Those problems are just regular life for them.



Seth Spire is aiding SnowCap Community Charities' food pantry ministry in Portland.

While it doesn't diminish the risks I've taken and how I've grown this year, it certainly does give perspective to how blessed I am to be able to *choose* to be risk-averse and how important it is to use my privilege to continue to serve human needs.

*Seth Spire is a member of Sangerville Church of the Brethren from Bridgewater, Va.*

**Help wanted!** La Puente Enterprises and Rainbow's End thrift store in Colorado needs a volunteer couple to manage the resale shop. If interested, contact [bvs@brethren.org](mailto:bvs@brethren.org) for details.

**Enabling the world to flourish**

*by Ashley Martin*



Ashley Martin, third from right, with Lydia's House community.

Through serving in BVS, I have experienced and learned many things: how to be more independent, how to navigate a city, and the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. But the most impactful thing I have acquired knowledge about is the power of community.

At Lydia's House, not only do the families who seek shelter with us live in community with one another, but all the staff does, as well. Nightly community dinner and knowing I always have someone to talk to or hang out with within arm's reach is a wonderful feeling.

This sense of community goes far beyond Lydia's, as well. Vineyard Central is a local church in the neighborhood that is connected to a pay-what-you-can café, both of which I have become involved in. Everyone in my neighborhood is friendly with one another and never hesitates to offer a helping hand, a characteristic that I truly value. No matter who someone is, everyone is treated with the same amount of care, love, and respect around here.

A loving community is what allows the world to flourish, and I feel so grateful that I have been able to be a part of this community this year.

*Ashley Martin is from Wirtz, Va. She is serving at a new BVS project: Lydia's House, in Cincinnati, Ohio.*

**Serving in Europe: My thanksgiving is to God** *by Walton Moyer, Unit 20*

*BVS supporter Richard Moyer recently sent in some BVS reports and reflections that his father, Walton Moyer (who passed away in April 2022), wrote while serving as a BVSer in Europe from 1953 to 1955. Here are a few of his entries:*



Walton Moyer

**#29, July 11, 1954**

Our main job in material aid this week was distributing cheese. ... In these four days I made over 100 visits to all kinds of people. The fact that I'm from America gives the small gift from America a special significance to the people who receive it. ... One lady in Sandershausen made me stay and drink coffee at her place. Some other neighbors came over and brought cake along to eat. The lady put the piece of cheese which I brought on the table and proudly showed it to the neighbors. They were all so happy because it was the lady's

birthday, and my visit brought a surprise which she would not easily forget.

**#33, August 8, 1954**

Galen Weaver invited me to take part in the Peace Seminar, so I stayed in Kassel Haus until Wednesday. The Peace Seminar is similar to an international work camp in that young people from different nations come together and work on some project. ... On Monday morning we ate an early breakfast and piled into the International truck which took us to Schwarzenau. This peaceful village, the birthplace of the Church of the Brethren, is the scene of a work camp directed by Dick Faust. ...

We ate our lunch on a hill overlooking the "Valley of Peace" and had a vesper service in the evening on a hill overlooking the Eder River. There, in the evening quietness, the Lord's Prayer was prayed

eight times in succession—each time in a different language. It gave me the impression that Christians the world over are already united in one faith and one Lord. Such a work camp demonstrates brotherhood in action.

**#49, November 28, 1954**

A milestone was reached this week in my (Brethren Service) experience. It was on Thanksgiving Day in 1953 that I together with four other BVS volunteers first set foot on European soil in Rotterdam, Holland. Now a full year has passed. The twelve months which have gone by are history, and I'm thankful for having had the privilege of living them in this capacity of service. Each day passed by, one by one, loaded with opportunities for serving and doing good. As I look back, failures and shortcomings were as prevalent as successes; perhaps more so. My thanksgiving is to God who uses unprofitable servants in the building of His Kingdom here on earth.



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