

Benedictine Volunteer Corps

Waiting in Hope

Michael Reilly

Though so much of what happens in our world and in our lives is beyond our ability to influence or control, there is one constant throughout our lifetime: we determine how we respond to every situation. We can control our effort and our attitude. Since March 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, managing expectations is what most of the world has been doing. The 2020–2021 chapter of the Benedictine Volunteer Corps (BVC) is no different.

Because of the pandemic, four-teen Benedictine Volunteers began their year of service at Saint John’s Abbey, while three volunteers assisted at Newark Abbey, New Jersey, teaching courses to students at St. Benedict’s Preparatory School. In Collegeville, each volunteer immersed himself into the daily—but in light of COVID, highly unusual—routine. Dealing with the anxiety of not knowing when (or if) their site would open, the frustration of not being able to serve their assigned monastic community, and the disappointment in their premature removal from campus and consequent lack of closure surrounding their senior year in college, the volunteers have responded well, managing their expectations, controlling their attitudes.

to participate fully in expressing the abbey’s mission. Two volunteers were assigned to Saint John’s Preparatory School, acting as tutors and substitute teachers. Two assisted the university COVID team by working as contact tracers, while others were certified COVID-19 testing administrators, administering tests to the monastic community and staff. Some volunteers worked outdoors, battling the invasive and ubiquitous buckthorn in the abbey arboretum. Those who can stand the heat, assisted in the kitchen: as servers in the student refectory or as full-time cooks for the fourteen Benedictine Volunteers. Teaching skills are being developed by those volunteers who assist as English-as-a-Second-Language tutors for monastics studying in the School of Theology or as online teachers for students at Colegio San Benito in Esquipulas, Guatemala.

After classes began they dispersed to different departments

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Benedictine Volunteers at play

BVC archives



Benedictine Volunteers assisting with COVID-19 testing

BVC archives

Twice weekly the volunteers gather for physical exercise. The director of the Benedictine Volunteer Corps, Brother Paul Richards, stresses the importance of physical activity and its ability to strengthen one’s body and mind. Weather permitting, volunteers eagerly engage in football, ultimate frisbee, volleyball, canoeing, baseball, or soccer. They also attend to their emotional health. Along with Brother Paul, they reflect on their personal “tapes”—events and experiences that shaped them into the men they are today. This educational piece is vital in deconstructing the masks that men in particular use to hide their vulnerabilities. The BVC participants have the opportunity to become vulnerable and

share that vulnerability with their peers. The volunteers understand the importance of the moment. Their immersion in the daily monastic routine of work and prayer has grounded them in a solid foundation of stability, enabling them to reframe the frustrating COVID situation in a positive manner. They have taken up their crosses and are joyful in hope: hope for positive news from their assigned communities in foreign lands; hope for the success of the scientists, researchers, and all medical professionals working diligently to discover a cure or vaccine for the coronavirus; and hope that our society, in Benedictine fashion, will

welcome all people as Christ (*Rule* 53).

While patiently waiting to hear from abroad, the Benedictine Volunteers participate in the “new normal” daily life of Collegeville. They continue to inspire the community around them by grounding themselves in the discipline of work and prayer. May we look to our Benedictine Volunteers as examples of resiliency and service! May we, like them, be joyful in hope! **A**

Mr. Michael Reilly, who served as a Benedictine Volunteer at Christ the King Priory, Tororo, Uganda, in 2019–2020, is the assistant director of the Benedictine Volunteer Corps.