

Benedictine Volunteer Corps

Nicholas Crowley

Beginning in 2003, graduates of Saint John's University have provided service at monasteries around the world through their participation in the Saint John's Benedictine Volunteer Corps (BVC). Mr. Nicholas Bancks was the trailblazer, serving at Saint Benedict's Preparatory School (SBP), conducted by Newark Abbey in New Jersey. Immediately following Nick, Mr. Ryan Radmer and Mr. Robert Kirsch began their service. In 2005 Mr. Andy Dirksen, along with the future Benedictine Father Michael Leonard Hahn, took up residence in Newark. For the next three years, Andy and Michael Leonard were fixtures at Saint Benedict's Prep: teaching, coaching, tutoring, mentoring, and working in the dormitory.

Because of the hard work of these early volunteers, the relationship between Newark and Saint John's has flourished. To date, thirty-three Johnnies have served in Newark, thirty-eight SBP graduates went on to attend Saint John's University (SJU), and five of those Johnnies volunteered with the BVC.

Brother Paul Richards, O.S.B., founder of the Benedictine Volunteer Corps, recognizes the unintended outcomes of the program. Without a doubt, Saint Benedict's Prep has been an influential, life-changing force for the Newark students. It has



BVC archives

Saint Benedict's Preparatory School been an equally life-changing force for the Benedictine Volunteers.

I can attest to these unintended outcomes. Being a part of a national winning soccer program, teaching for the first time and seeing growth in my students in the classroom and on the pitch, and witnessing the tears and struggles that some of my students had to endure have really changed my perspective. I sought to help where needed, but I believe that I received the bigger return on my BVC investment. The experiences and the relationships I formed with students, faculty, and monks have given direction to my life. Others have had similar, life-changing experiences:

“Benedict's hates a quitter,” greets every young man who enters the school, and I came to appreciate the dedication and determination with which these young men met every task as they struggled to succeed against mighty odds—poverty, single-

empathetic to my underserved students. During my time in Newark, I helped coach a national champion; I dodged a drive-by shooting with my cross country team; I survived Hurricane Sandy. I was blown away by the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the city—and by the love shown me.

Ryan Miller, SJU 2012, BVC 2012
Newark

I arrived in Newark, overconfident of my ability to teach. I ended up living at Saint Benedict's for three years—learning much more than I taught. The place continues to claim my attention because of the devoted individuals who form its heart.

Michael Leonard Hahn, O.S.B.,
SJU 2005, BVC 2005 Newark

One reason I attended SJU was because of the influence of Benedictine Volunteers at SBP. They also influenced my decision to join the BVC—I wanted to have an impact on others as well. I have never regretted going to Saint John's nor joining the BVC.

Alexander Melchor, SBP 2013,
SJU 2017, BVC Bogotá

I befriended a Benedictine Volunteer during my freshman year at Saint Benedict's Prep. That friendship changed my life: persuading me to visit SJU (in February!), which made me realize it was time to leave my comfort zone, and led me to enroll at Saint John's.

Nicholas Devasia, SBP 2017,
SJU 2021

During my time at Saint Benedict's Prep, I had the privilege of working with several Benedictine Volunteers. They provided me with great advice and support. The brotherly bonds that I have with them is one of the reasons I decided to attend Saint John's.

Farrad Williams, SBP 2016,
SJU 2020

The Benedictine Volunteers who served here have all impressed me with their willing and joyful service. All took a leap of faith into teaching. It isn't hyperbole to say that the BVC's presence in and service to our community are integral to our ability to pro-

vide opportunities for our students. We are grateful to be matched with BVC men who have a desire to join our mission. Perhaps the biggest contribution that the BVC has made is through their presence. When someone from the outside chooses to spend a year here, working with teenagers from the inner city and their crazy teachers, and commits himself to our mission—Is that not an expression of Christ's love?

Michelle Tuorto, Dean of Faculty,
Saint Benedict's Prep

Mr. Nicholas Crowley is a faculty resident at Saint John's University.



Jake Barnes BVC 2009 (left), teacher and mentor

Since 1857 the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey have served an immigrant population, even as that population changed from German to Irish, to Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, Nigerian, and more. In the 1960s and '70s racial tensions, characterized by an influx of African-Americans from the South, and white flight to the suburbs, were added to the challenges. Saint Benedict's Preparatory School (SBP) was founded to serve local families, families increasingly numbered among the inner-city poor. Under the leadership of Father Edwin Leahy, O.S.B., SBP has had tremendous success academically, athletically, and socially. With a nearly 100% graduation rate and almost 100% college matriculation rate, SBP has overcome the tensions and challenges. Prep's athletic success is equally remarkable: SBP athletes have won national high school titles and gone on to compete on NCAA Division I teams, in the National Basketball Association, Major League Soccer, and other professional or national teams. Above all, Saint Benedict's Prep is committed to social change and community building.

“Whatever hurts my brother, hurts me.”