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the Warming House

COMMUNITY • DIGNITY • NOURISHMENT

Summer 2025

From campus to community

*Warming House experience
inspires generations*

By Alice Miller Nation

It is always a joy welcoming new Bonnies and their parents to campus at orientation each summer. The excitement on campus is real as hundreds come to learn about the institution many have heard so much about from family members, friends or school counselors.



One of my favorite parts of orientation is when current students talk to new SBU parents about their involvement in University Ministries and how it has transformed their Bona experience.

This was the case for Katie Crawford, a first-year transfer student who found her way to FCSC Assistant Director Mike Waseda's office on a cold day last January. Katie was on a mission that morning.

As a new student at Bona's, she was encouraged to "get involved." It was at the top of her list of things to do that day. After meeting Mike and expressing her interest in the Warming House, she started volunteering the next day and has never looked back!

Inspired by her initial volunteering, Katie quickly embraced a leadership role as this summer's Warming House coordinator. At orientation, she shared how she anticipated serving soup and sandwiches, but has learned to make shrimp scampi, homemade meatballs with spaghetti, and fish tacos, along with develop-



▲ Several members of the 2025 Warming House summer team: (from left) Dhavgely Mendoza, Katie Crawford, Astrid Reyes and Gabby Da Silva.

ing leadership and management skills.

I enjoy hearing from our students how experiences of serving and caring for others have made them better people. Many never expected to volunteer or work at a soup kitchen during college. It is that very soup kitchen that changed their outlook on life and their responsibilities to others.

Reunion Weekend 2025 was another weekend filled with stories and laughter as we opened the Warming House for a few hours on Saturday afternoon to welcome former volunteers and friends. Alumni recounted how their service experiences equipped them with enduring leadership and communication skills. Their stories reaffirm the Warming House's role as a catalyst for personal and professional growth among students.

Years later, former Warming House volunteers can still remember the names and faces of the guests they served in the 1970s and '80s. We have always known the Warming House can offer a transformational experience for our students. Listening to those who came back that

afternoon confirmed our belief.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share the Warming House experience with so many students and guests alike. Your generous contributions are appreciated. Without your donations of food, financial support, and volunteer hours during our students' breaks, the Warming House could not operate. I also want to thank the foundations and grantors that sustain the Warming House: **Dr. Lyle F. Reno-din Foundation, St. Elizabeth Mission Society, ACOR, United Way of Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties, Cattaraugus County Youth Bureau, Toulmin Foundation and Feed More WNY.**

Thank you so very much for your ongoing support and interest in the amazing ways SBU students care for the most vulnerable of our community. (Alice Miller Nation is director of University Ministries at the university.)

A Transformative Pilgrimage

St. Bonaventure students reflect on journey to Assisi and Rome

By Kathleen Biong Percegon, '25



From Dec. 27, 2024, to Jan. 6, 2025, 11 students, Alice Miller Nation, and Fr. Steve Kuehn, O.F.M., embarked on a pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome, Italy. The students on this pilgrimage were Warming House meal coordinators or Bona Buddies coordinators.

For many, the pilgrimage seemed like a chance to travel and explore with a spiritual twist. It quickly transformed into something far deeper: a spiritual awakening and a life-changing journey.

“When we were first told about the pilgrimage to Italy,” shared Kevin Eberth, “I instantly thought back to the same trip my mother took years ago. I couldn’t wait to experience the sights and moments she cherished. It was a time to grow closer to God, to Francis, and to the people around me.”

Kevin’s reflection echoed a common thread: This was no ordinary trip.

“Italy was a surreal experience. We visited so many sacred places. Being in those spaces with some of my closest friends deepened both my faith and my appreciation for Franciscan values,” Natalie Ponzi said.

Emma Gavazzi shared a beautiful experience: “As I sat in front of an outdoor altar on that chilly morning writing a reflection to myself, I had an enduring feeling of God being with me and God being in me.”

Reflecting on the journey, Maxwell Wolfe also shared: “The pilgrimage to Italy has forever changed me. I am so grateful for the opportunity I had and I hope others can experience it as well.”

Kylee Leonard found her expectations transformed. “When we started seeing and hearing more about things we have learned about at St. Bonaventure, it turned into much more than just a fun trip with friends.”

Molly Edgington agreed. “After three years of learning about Francis, standing in the places where he once walked was breathtaking,” she said.

As the pilgrims reflected on their experiences, they shared insights into how the



▲ On a very wet afternoon, the St. Bonaventure pilgrims made their way to Bagnoregio, the birthplace of St. Bonaventure and had a quick photo op after walking the pedestrian bridge to the old city.

journey shifted their mindset on faith, material wealth and gratitude.

Q: How did the pilgrimage reshape your perspective on material wealth?

“I discovered that the Franciscan values challenge us to look beyond worldly possessions and ambitions and focus on fostering peace and living with integrity. The pilgrimage taught me that true richness in life lies in simplicity and in embracing the humility and love exemplified by St. Francis.”

– PARIS CHRISTIE

Q: What was your biggest takeaway from the pilgrimage?

“This pilgrimage is a lifelong journey. Just because we are back home with our friends and family does not mean that we should stop living the way that Francis and Clare did every day of their lives.”

– NATHAN SOBKO

Q: How did this pilgrimage impact your gratitude and reflection?

“I was able to positively reflect and thank each person who helped me on my journey as a student as I walked through each Holy Door. This pilgrimage allowed me to reflect on all my blessings and be grateful.”

– AIDAN BOYLE

Q: How did studying at SBU influence your pilgrimage experience?

“At St. Bonaventure University, we learn about the values of St. Francis and St. Clare. Some of these values include humility, charity, service to the poor and marginalized, compassion, wisdom, and integrity. While I have done my best to embrace those values as a student, especially through my work at the Warming House, there is nothing quite like learning about these values in Rome and Assisi.”

– ABIGAIL DOCOS

(Kathleen Biong Percegon completed her MBA at the university in May.)



▲ Aiden Boyle, '25, enters St. John Lateran through the Holy Door celebrating the Jubilee year in Rome.

Starting the conversation: the gifts of the Warming House are more than a meal

By Casey Reed, '28



It takes courage to start a conversation with a stranger, even when you think they’re “just like you.” For many new students at St. Bonaventure, this challenge is taken a step further at the Warming House.

Gabe Cote, a student coordinator at the Warming House, remembers his first time volunteering there. “I knew no one. It was my first day. That was difficult. I didn’t exactly know what I was getting myself into,” he said.

This feeling is common among new volunteers at the Warming House. Through his experience, Gabe has learned that “a lot of it is looking at the other person (Warming House guest) and recognizing that they are an individual with their own lived experiences.” Gabe reminds us that we are more similar than we imagine; we are all human and have similar desires and needs.

Coordinator Nate Sobko suggests that the best way to overcome the initial nerves is to “throw yourself into it.”

He recalls that on his first day at the Warming House, the kitchen had all the help it needed so Nate was invited to go into the dining room and talk to the guests. Unlike many new volunteers, the guests aren’t timid at all and are willing to engage in conversation.

The Warming House offers more than just nutritional needs: It provides warmth in the cold, a caring community, and meaningful conversations. Though a warm meal is the primary offering, it’s the intangible gifts — such as meaningful conversation — that leave a lasting impression on both guests and volunteers.

Student volunteer Guinevere Brady visits twice a week because she loves “talking to people.” She also has a strong need to give back and the Warming House makes her excited to have somewhere to put that feeling.

Freshman coordinator Kristi Crandall says that the Warming House has taught her better communication and life skills from connecting with people whom she doesn’t always see eye-to-eye.

When asked the same question, one



▲ Nathan Sobko, Abby Docos, Kylee Leonard and Ava Ordway pose with plated meals as they make their way to the dining room to serve our guests.

guest said the Warming House “definitely lifts your spirits up having a warm meal.” Organizations like the Warming House have helped her to now be “92 days off drugs” and has offered her a place that allows her to get back to life.

Another longtime guest says that he is always asked “why I eat here even though I have some money.” He explained that while the free meal still helps him, the community at the Warming House is a big part of what brings him back.

The Warming House not only offers support and nutrition for the food insecure in the Olean area but also allows volunteers to be part of the guests’ journeys. Student volunteers and coordinators encounter guests on their good days as well as their challenging days.

The Warming House provides an opportunity to meet people who many college students might never encounter, in an environment where compassion and support are the norm. Stretching oneself to engage with others can be an intimidating, but generations of Bona students have embraced the challenge to serve the food insecure with compassion and dignity, much like St. Francis modeled.

(Casey Reed is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Adolescence Education with a concentration in English Language Arts.)