

# Field for Treasure

The Bethlehem Farm Newsletter

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

WINTER 2007

## Angell Sightings Less Frequent at Bethlehem Farm

By Ed Pluchar

Exactly a year ago from the date of this writing (January 16, 2007), an Angell came to live at Bethlehem Farm. It could be said by many, and least effectively by me, that Heather Angell's time at Bethlehem Farm was joyful though challenging, a sequence of grace-filled moments. Right from the start, Heather kept count of the days, then weeks, then months that she had spent at the Farm. About January 31 last year, Heather said, "15 days." I couldn't imagine what she meant. Smiling, she said, "I've been at the Farm now for 15 days."

As well as any woman could, she endured, and even celebrated, many days living with three men (Russ, Chris, and me). There was an occasion when the four of us and a visitor, Erin, spent the morning playing dodgeball in the yard. In fact, Chris and I were late to work because we were coaxed, mostly by Heather, to stay home and continue playing. There remains from that day (her one-month anniversary, approximately) a picture of Heather, airborne, a dodgeball in each hand, pouncing on me as I cowered beneath her. There also

remains a bruise on my ego from the ensuing pegs.

Heather approached every activity and challenge with vigor, from gardening to ping-pong to wood splitting to hosting a square-dance during community night (that was around her 10 month anniversary). She became the official leader of shared prayer, and she led those prayers with honesty and compassion, inviting all present to share their experiences of God. In a house with three others, all men, there was a good deal of sass exchanged, but Heather could deliver the sass of four grown women. I would sass her now, except for my fear of her retribution.

Heather established and developed an irreplaceable role in our local community. She was the first of the Caretakers to participate in a softball game with the inmates at the Alderson Women's Prison Camp; she spent many hours with "the church ladies," a group of women from St. Mary Parish in Alderson, who doted on her as much as she adored them; she dedicated many hours to the

care of local homes, during and outside of group weeks, and nurtured authentic friendships with people like Barbara McLean and Faye Miller in Hinton, and many people at the Alderson Thrift Store.

Heather now devotes herself to St. John's Prep, an all-boys high school in Massachusetts. I daresay that her experience living with three men has aptly prepared her for this new calling, where her gifts of prayerfulness, thoughtfulness, outreach, and sass will be well spent. Heather, as a show of your gratitude to me, a plateful of cranberry, chocolate chip scones would be appropriate.

Some weeks ago, Heather brought home the last of her belongings: A chocolate lab named Gage, whom Heather adopted from the local Humane Society. While none of her possessions remain, memories too numerous to retell are gathered and immovable, kept in our hearts. With sincerity and gratitude I say, "Happy 12 month anniversary, Heather." You will be with us for many more.

## A Word from a Distant Relative

By Carlos Sancho Zamora, from Spain, volunteer on Adult Week 2006

One can never really know why God sometimes gives us such wonderful gifts without our deserving them, but it's clear that He has mercy on us all. In the Summer of 2006 I met a wonderful family, the Carr's, with whom I went to West Virginia [for the St. Michael's Adult Week]. When we arrived I was really impressed by the lush countryside. Some people from Indiana and other places gave us a warm welcome and explained to us the history of Bethlehem Farm. It's unbelievable to think some young people under 30 have the idea of living in poverty and trying to live the social teachings of the Catholic

Church. They are just brave!

After reflecting on these teachings and doing some work around the farm, we began our work outside the farm. Though I am not skilled [at construction] at all, I realized how much I can do when love moves me to do things; I am ready to learn quickly because it's my heart who is involved in the task and not only my hands. We basically had three different types of work, and the first was to paint some old cabooses; "So, what is this for?" I asked myself. At first it seemed we were doing

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### BETHLEHEM FARM WISH LIST:

- Prayers
- Funds for road repair
- Wood-burning boiler
- Solar panels
- Weedwacker, cord style
- Hydraulic Jack and four (4) jack stands
- 14" Bandsaw
- Stamps
- Dust buster vacuums
- Pillows
- Mattresses
- Splitting Mauls
- Post-hole diggers
- More Prayers

## Our Newest Advisory Board Member: George Carr

The Bethlehem Farm Advisory Board joyfully welcomes George Carr as the newest board member. George and his wife, Joanne, live in Wheaton, Illinois where they are active parishioners at St. Michael's parish. Since retiring as president from Follett Campus Resources after 34 years with the company, George has become a full-time volunteer. He teaches a 7<sup>th</sup> grade Religious Education class, works at the local food pantry, serves on the parish worship commission, trains altar servers, actively participates in a small Christian community, began the parish vocations committee and is a member of the Serra Club.

After being part of Nazareth Farm's Adult weeks a couple of times, George first came to Bethlehem Farm with a group of adults from St. Michael's in July of 2005, and again in 2006. In his spare time, George enjoys his family of 3 sons and several grandchildren.

George is a big man with a big heart. His many talents and deep spirituality are a gift to the entire Bethlehem Farm community. (Thank you Pat Ruggaber for this introduction).



A picture from St. Michael's Adult Week, 2005. Pictured (left to right) are Brian Boyle, Pat Ruggaber, George Carr, and Chuck Gaul.

### Can Simplicity keep you warm at night?

By Russ Plywaczynski

"It's a little cold in here. Don't you all have heat?" For our first two years, our answer to this question was, "Well, not really. We have a couple wood stoves, but they're not really big enough for the house, and our propane system doesn't work. But we have lots of blankets!" Now, after countless hours of planning, a week's worth of grunt work, and above all, the huge generosity of our friend Dan Chmura, we now have a reliable, efficient heating system... and, as an added bonus, instant hot water!

I've lost count of how many times I've been asked, "How do you live there without heat?" The answer, in a word, is simplicity. What is meant by simplicity? Am I saying that it's good not

to have a warm house in cold weather, that we should all give up any sort of warmth and comfort to be more "simple?" I wouldn't think so. I am now thankful for living in a warm house in cold weather, especially after two years of living in a cold house in cold weather.

What I mean by simplicity is that we must not let attachments get in the way of following our deepest desires, the path that God invites us to. St. Ignatius, in The Spiritual Exercises, invites us to pray that we may be free of all attachments that distract us from our desire to love and serve God and God's

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### Carlos, continued from Page 1...

nothing for poor people, but then I realized that there were good reasons for doing this: To try to bring prosperity to the village which is precisely one of the aims of the social teachings of the Church. There I met Jimmy, a very good man from the mountains, meek and humble. I learned a lot from him.

Secondly, we had to paint part of a house, the kitchen and balcony, of an older lady, a famous cook. She wasn't very poor either but seemed to be alone and in need of help. We are all poor in one sense or another, God only knows... Barbara was very generous and bought delicious food for every one and, as in the gospel, there were leftovers. God took care of us that day through this woman.

Finally we happened to meet the face of Christ in Brian. That was the hardest day from all points of view. We did very little compared to the task we had to do: Brian's house burnt down 6 weeks previous and he had nothing. Somebody lent him another house, which was in terrible condition, without the bare necessities. We just listened to him, which was without any doubt the most important thing. Brian told us, "I don't want just your tasks, that I really need, but your love, your affection for me." He was looking for Christ in us and we were looking for Christ

in him, we both found HIM. I wonder how my brother Brian may live in such conditions... the answer is to look at the cross and I will be able to understand.

By the end of our stay, the cabooses were painted when it seemed to be impossible, Barbara got most of her house painted, and Brian got cold and hot running water, flushing toilets, the pipes of the bathrooms set, and the ceilings of one of his rooms fixed; now he may live with the dignity of the children of God as the social teaching of the Church teaches us.

Our group from St. Michael's also had good moments, including bonfires with S'mores, fireworks beside the river, swimming in the river, jokes, music and most importantly prayer, which gave us the strength to go on every day.

Some of our friends summed up our stay saying, "This was a meeting of wonderful people in a wonderful place." Perfect summary. Before going back home we washed each other's feet as Jesus did before the last Supper to show us the way of life...SERVING one another as He did himself. At the end we waved to each other with the joy of Christians, with good humor and with our hearts full of love, full of happiness for having stayed at Bethlehem farm, farm of God, farm of love.

**Simplicity, continued from Page 2...**

people. Attachments complicate our lives; simplicity frees us. I joined Bethlehem Farm because I wanted to help foster a Catholic community that is of service to anybody and everybody around us. It just so happened that for our first two years, in order to build this community, we had to live with a broken heating system. I prayed for the grace of simplicity, to be free of all attachments that would lead me astray from my desire to help build Bethlehem Farm. This helped me to embrace the fact that for a few years, I would be living without reliable heat in the house.

Simplicity, along with the other cornerstones of community, prayer, and service, invites us to a more loving response to God's desire for us, to love and serve all of God's people. The cornerstones also help us to overcome the challenges that occur along the way.

**For our new, efficient heating system, Bethlehem Farm thanks:**

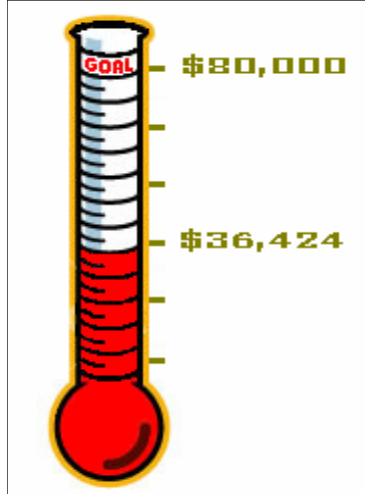
*Dan Chmura, Tom and Pat Ruggaber, Marcia and Robert Calamia, Joan Buck, Anonymous Donors, the Darien Rotary Club, and everyone who donates to the Farm!*

**Fundraising Update**

Thank you to our donors for your generous contributions! We met and exceeded our goal for fiscal year 2006 (10.1.05 – 9.30.06) with \$40,000 in total donations! As a result, we were able to strengthen our retreat programs, serve the local community effectively, and develop the Farm facilities for future growth.

Fiscal year 2007 (10.1.06 – 9.30.07) is poised to be a turning point for Bethlehem Farm. We overhauled our heating system and will be making extensive improvements to our access road. Our Caretaker community will be growing from one to five, we will offer more group weeks and, therefore, take on more service work in the local community. To meet the needs of this growing community, we need to raise \$80,000 in total donations this fiscal year. In four months time, we are almost half-way to our goal, with \$36,000 raised thus far. The final \$44,000 will be harder to find between now and September 30th, but we are confident that we will meet our

goal with a combination of grants, parish and school donations, and continued generosity from caring individuals who see the critical need for Bethlehem Farm's work in this world.



*Amount of funds raised for Bethlehem Farm since October 2006.*

**NEW Bethlehem Farm T-Shirts and Nalgene Bottles for Sale!**

We at Bethlehem Farm are now offering sweat-free, Organic Cotton t-shirts in three new colors: Natural (off-white), Tan, and Black. Our original, sweat-free, union-made t-shirts are also for sale, though we are temporary out of smalls.

That's not all! You can also purchase a 32 oz. Nalgene bottle bearing the Bethlehem Farm logo! Quench your bodily and spiritual thirst in one gulp from these Green, Clear Gray, and Blue bottles!

All T-shirt prices remain \$15, while Bethlehem Farm Nalgene bottles sell for \$12, which includes shipping and handling! Simply fill in the form below and send your order to: Bethlehem Farm, P.O. Box 274, Pence Springs, WV 24962. Checks or money orders only. If you would like to order more than one shirt or water bottle, give us a call or write a note detailing your order.

Please package me a shirt with the following distinguishing characteristics:

**Sweat-Free, Union Made...**

- Blue     Gray     Green  
 Medium     Large     X-Large

**Sweat-Free, Organic Cotton...**

- Natural (off-white)     Tan     Black  
 Small     Medium     Large     X-L     XX-L

I am interested in a 32 oz. Bethlehem Farm Nalgene bottle of the following color:

- Clear Gray     Blue     Green

Then send it to:

Here are my e-mail address and phone number, in case Bethlehem Farm needs to contact me about my order:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Street Address or P.O. Box)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (E-mail address)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (City, State, and Zip Code)

(\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Phone number)

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**We're on the Web!**  
**Bethlehemfarm.net**

Come see what's new on our website, including:

- A Bethlehem Farm promotional video produced by Chris Pluchar
- Newsletter archives and other publications
- Complete Caretaker application process and resources
- Adult and Family Week information and registration forms
- Updated Volunteer information and forms
- And more pictures!

## Farewell to the Kings

The Kings, a family from the Bruderhof community in rural Pennsylvania and New York, has operated the Hospitality House in Alderson since 2005. Since their arrival, they have made beds and prepared meals and painted walls, split wood and kept the house warm with their wood stove, and entertained guests with songs, stories, and games. In a word, they have thoroughly lived up to the name of their house and ministry in the service of visitors to the Alderson Federal Women's Prison Camp. Sadly, after just a few years of companionship with the Caretakers and volunteers of Bethlehem Farm, they will return to their community in Pennsylvania this February. Bethlehem Farm sends them off with love, prayers, a homemade afghan, hope, gratitude, and an open invitation to visit sometime soon.

## Bethlehem Farm Mission Statement

Bethlehem Farm is  
a Catholic community in Appalachia  
that transforms lives  
through service with the local community and  
the teaching of sustainable practices.  
We invite volunteers to join us  
in living the Gospel cornerstones of  
community, prayer, service and simplicity.

## A Reflection on our New Mission Statement

By Eric Fitts

I will reflect on our mission from three different perspectives: sacrifice, celebration, and creation. For this edition, the subject will be Sacrifice.

### Sacrifice

This verse from the First Letter of John came to me in an email recently and I feel that it speaks to what we are trying to do at Bethlehem Farm: *We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us - and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? - 1 John 3:16-17*

We know what love is by the example of Jesus laying down his life for us and we want to lay down our lives for one another. We want to lay down our lives for the local community in our corner of West Virginia, we want to lay down our lives in caring for Creation and being good stewards of God's Good Earth, and we want to lay down our lives for the volunteers from across the country, teens, college students, and adults, that walk through our doors. So . . . Bethlehem Farm is, at its heart, a small Christian community dedicated to following this example of Jesus in everything we do.

It is important to note that Jesus did not lay his life down for a cause. There are people these days who seem to be asking us to lay down our lives for many causes: for democracy, for the economy, for the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, for national security, for the flag, for our country, for a bigger house, for cheaper energy, for a newer car, for cheaper food, for more stuff. Our culture also tends to make it easy to lay our lives down for these things—the car dealer makes it as easy as possible for us to drive away in a new car (that is his job and he does it very well), the banker makes it as easy as they can to get us into a bigger house (that is her job and she does it very well), a multi-billion-dollar marketing industry makes it very easy to acquire stuff (that is their job and they do it very well). None of these things are bad to have and it is often possible to get them without laying down your life; none of these are bad jobs, but it is important to note that Jesus did not specifically ask us to lay down our lives for any of these causes. He asked us to lay down our lives for one another, especially the most vulnerable among us, as a way of learning how to love.

Bethlehem Farm has been created so we may encourage one another in laying down our lives for each other . . . so it is someone's *job* to encourage people in imitating Christ. To make it easier for a high school student from Chicago to lend a helping hand to an elderly woman in West Virginia. To make it easier for a family in West Virginia to teach a college student from Philadelphia a little something about Appalachian hospitality. To make it easier for us to tread a little lighter on this good earth. This is a high ideal and I don't mean to pretend that we are always successful. But I think that it is important for this to be someone's job and that it is essential that we do it very well.