

This Newsletter sponsored by:
Our Sunday Visitor

REMINDER!

Spots Still Open in 2016

May 8-14

July 24-30 (Adult Week)

July 31-Aug 6 (Family Week)

Aug 31-Sept 5 (All Comers)

October 8-15

October 16-22

Don't miss your chance to
serve with the Farm this year!

email if you have questions
volunteer@bethlehemfarm.net

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!

Caretaker & Fall servant
applications available
on our website!
www.bethlehemfarm.net

A Farmer's Meditations on Spring

by Tim, Farmer in Residence

Hope and change. Seasons and cycles. These two thoughts are synonymous. Winter is majestically fading and the snow is becoming ground water. You can see, smell and hear that blossom of hope as it opens and salutes photosynthetic wonder; the vernal equinox is just over the horizon. Here in Appalachia this beautiful seasonal change is one that inspires awe for that which is our abundant creation. Our eco system in Appalachia is a breath taking experience to be revered and patiently perceived. As an organic farmer this can be challenging. I love the gifts of God's creation and hopeful change. It allows dirt scratchers (Farmers) to feed their families, neighbors and communities. No matter what your station in this "big picture" may be, we all need food and water.

In this season of growth, let us as people ponder the awe-inspiring beauty of the eco-creation that nourishes us. We are sustained by the very microscopic, microbial, and bacteriological breakdown that we can only smell. This intricate system of bio decomposition forming new life allows us to plant, forage, produce, harvest, and eat.



*Our hoop house!
Brimming with microbial life and delicious food thanks in large part to Tim's love of ecosystems and compost*

In praise as a human take some extra time to feel, see, hear, smell and witness the very beautiful cycles that you as a human need to be sustained and nourished as a part of this eco-creation. So with this change comes abundant hope for soil and people to thoughtfully embrace each of our footprints and impact on the very creation that provides life to us. Brothers, Sisters, Catholics, Buddhists, salamanders, Nubian goats, Slippery Elms, and Stowell's evergreen sweet corn: we are all part of this picture of growth and life. Salute and praise the winter that is fading, as it abundantly charges our aquifer. Patiently ponder God's creation and the nourishment of eye, heart, soul, and stomach.

Laudato Si' and the Farms

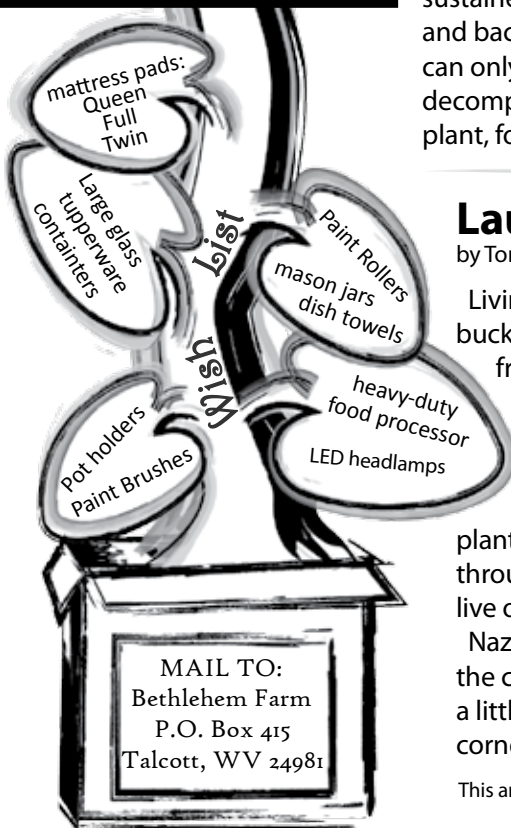
by Tom, Nazareth Farm Staff

Living simply: rocking in porch chairs, getting to know another volunteer, pouring a warm bucket shower over your head—with the sky above you—to take off the dirt and grime from a week at the worksites, making music late into the night, with only your voices and a guitar as instruments. Vigilantly turning off electric lights when you leave a room. Conserving water through the "if it's yellow, let it mellow" system, or simply using an outhouse. Reusing or recycling whenever we can. Taking only the food that you can eat in solidarity with those who go without. Caring for pets and garden plants. Asking a question about fossil-fuel extraction and sustainable solutions. Hiking through hills, admiring God's grandeur in nature. All of these are ways that our volunteers live out our cornerstone of simplicity at Nazareth Farm.

Nazareth Farm and our sister farms, Bethlehem Farm and Jerusalem Farm, have lived out the cornerstone of simplicity for all of our shared histories together. Simplicity may look a little different at each farm, but since each of our beginnings we have practiced this cornerstone as a way of living out the Gospel message of God's creation.

This article is part of our *Our Sunday Visitor* catechetical series

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The Christian Practice of Conflict Resolution

by Mary Catherine, Caretaker

As people who live in the world, we are always interacting with others on lots of levels, personally and professionally. There is no way of escaping the reality of conflict, whether we talk about it or not. We are all different, so we are going to disagree.

What would happen if we all decided to cast out or ignore anyone who disagreed with us? There are plenty of examples in the world where we can see how that plays out; our political system, our churches, our neighborhoods, our schools, even our families. This approach can create deep wounds leaving people marginalized and alienated. As Christians, we are called to seek reconciliation. It is through conflict resolution that we can find healing and be led into a deeper understanding of each other and Christ's love.

Conflict resolution is an approach to conflict in which you directly address the issue with whomever is involved. Many different methods that have developed over time, some have become systematic, like the court system. Others, such as Truth councils or peace circles, often arise in response to the needs of large communities. Still others like nonviolent communication models are adopted by small intentional communities.

The basis for conflict resolution can be found in the scriptures when certain behavior is prescribed. For example in James, it is instructed that "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God," (1:19-20). In Ephesians we are called to be intentional; discerning the power and timing of our words, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear" (4:29). In Matthew 18: 15-17, we are given a specific conflict resolution model; "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens

to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church". We are told to handle the conflict directly with the person first and foremost honoring the relationship that is shared. It is only after the one on one approach is tried that you engage the group.

Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger

James 1:19

Being a faith based intentional community, we, as Caretakers, find conflict resolution to be very valuable. We are currently using a method called C.E.G.s: Confessions, Encouragements, and Grievances. We set a specific time each week to sit down together and discuss what is on our minds and hearts. This allows all members to have the space to address any issues that they were unable to address prior to the meeting. We encourage handling conflict one on one, but recognize that some people prefer to address conflict in the group or haven't had time for a one on one conversation. In addition to addressing conflict, we confess our own mistakes and encourage others' gifts and sacrifices. This model has been very good for our community and has helped us all grow and learn from each other. We have found that conflict resolution encourages more communication and openness. Also, it allows for deeper and stronger relationship to grow. That said, it is not infallible. Conflict can be messy even with well thought out, structured systems. However, the system does help to alleviate some of the messiness and bring us a little closer to Christ and each other.

Our Jolly Green Grocer

by Lauren, Caretaker

Since my arrival as a Caretaker, I worked for Catholic Charities at Loaves and Fishes, a thrift store and food pantry. In September a business decision was made by Catholic Charities to cut the contract between them and Bethlehem Farm. One of my main roles as a Caretaker was working there year round running the food pantry and community garden, so this decision was surprising. Brian and Kathleen DeRouen, former Caretakers and current Alderson, WV residents, invited me down to talk over this significant change in my life. Brian, being the person who began the relationship between Catholic Charities and Bethlehem Farm six years ago during his time as a

Caretaker, was the perfect person to talk to. I felt relieved when he invited me over to talk things out.

We were conversing about the recent decision when Brian mentioned how the Alderson Community Food Hub (ACFH) AmeriCorps position had not been filled yet. My ears perked up and I found myself asking questions about the position. Kathleen walked in and we began throwing around the idea of me becoming the AmeriCorps worker for the ACFH and ways Bethlehem Farm volunteers could serve the local food system in Alderson. One thing led to another and soon I was signing papers to fill the AmeriCorps position at the Food Hub.

...continued on next page

Green Grocer Continued...

This opportunity to engage the local food system with Bethlehem Farm's mission seemed too good to be true. In light of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and Bethlehem Farms already established presence with local food producers, I knew the partnership with ACFH would be a success. Thus far it has been!

The Food Hub is an umbrella organization that includes the Alderson Community Gardens, the Alderson Community Market, Farm-to-School program, Mobile Market, the Alderson Green Grocer, The Alderson Community Orchard and Educational Programs. The newest entity of the ACFH is the Green Grocer, which is a non-profit grocery store providing local, organic and conventional groceries to the

Alderson community. I wear many hats in my role at the ACFH including but not limited to membership coordination and communication, communicating with local food producers about what crops the Food Hub would buy for the Green Grocer and Farm-to-School programs, and assisting in the daily operations of the Green Grocer.

The Food Hub is a wonderful example of how it's possible to make local food accessible to all. Additionally the ACFH invests money into the local economy by supporting local farmers and producers, something we advocate for at the Farm. I am excited to introduce the ACFH to Bethlehem Farm volunteers and engage them in the Food Hub and local community.



Laudato Si' continued...

We view simple and sustainable living as striving for right relationship with each other and our natural world. It is an essential message of the transformational service-retreats that we hold for our volunteers year round.

It was with great joy that our three communities received Pope Francis's new encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*. The Pope's encyclical speaks aloud the connections between our Christian faith, a simple lifestyle, and our human vocation of caring for "nature... and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters (64)." This is a conviction that has motivated our communities from the outset. The staff members of the three farms joined together in a meeting at Bethlehem Farm in October 2015, and we talked with excitement about the ways we can continue give a voice to the Gospel message found in *Laudato Si*.

Our way of living out *Laudato Si* begins with the simple, modest, and joyful lifestyle of our farms. It is a lifestyle that was inspired by our neighbors. It is also uniquely in touch with our surroundings and the natural rhythm of life. I want to quote Pope Francis's words on this kind of Christian simplicity:

We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that "less is more"... Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. (LS 222)

The "alternative understanding of the quality of life" discussed here is the alternative lifestyle that our young volunteers experience on our retreats. We challenge them to live differently while on retreat. We ask them to ditch the devices and consumer items—phones, computers, music players, beauty products, and more—that fill up so much of young people's lives in today's world. They go without some of the comforts of their lives at homes—for instance, we take fewer and shorter showers to save water. We tell our volunteers that they put these things aside to make more room for what is truly important. Without the clutter that crowds so much of our lives, you can pay more attention to yourself, to your neighbors, to your world, and to God. It is amazing how this experience can open our volunteer's eyes to so many new things. Many of our volunteers discuss in the shared prayer that we hold each week how they saw God in nature, in a simple conversation with someone else, in a quiet moment before God. Simplicity opens us up to these things, and to our world that we must care for with love.

How is Bethlehem Farm Putting *Laudato Si'* into practice?

Our solar hot water tanks and solar electric panels will go in *this spring!*

Solar Electric Panels

- 60% of our electric needs will be met
- save 4.5 more tons of coal and 18,000lbs of CO2 per year

Solar Hot Water Tanks

- greatly reduce propane & electric use during group season
- savings projected to be thousands of dollars

Donate using the enclosed envelope to help with the Farm's stewardship of resources!

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.

CARETAKER COMMUNITY:

- Mary Catherine McDonald
- Colleen Fitts
- Eric Fitts
- Tim Peregoy
- Katherine Peregoy
- Jena Barnhill
- Carly Ann Braun
- Carley Knapp
- Kim Bremer
- Lauren Schoendorf
- Richard Storey

BOARD MEMBERS:

- Scott McNelis
- Kathryn Silberman
- Caitlin Morneau
- Jake Teitgen
- Frederick Pratt
- Fr. Arthur Bufogle
- Sharyl Pels
- John Hannagan
- Eric Fitts
- Paul Daugherty
- Brian Suehs-Vassel

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By our friends at PostNet in Lewisburg, WV

Projects Update!

Wondering what we were up to this Fall and Winter?

James “Tank” and Wanda Sears: Carly Ann and Richard led volunteers in October constructing for Tank and Wanda a new front porch. Kim and MC also spent a few days on the project. Richard also installed a new storm door for them in November.

Fred Elkins: Kim led volunteers in putting a new metal roof over Fred’s leaking shingled roof. She accomplished most of the work on our two October weeks, and finished it with Richard, MC, Carly Ann, and a rare but coveted Colleen cameo shortly thereafter.

Glen and Linda Morgan: Richard and MC led some volunteers this January repairing the Morgns’ bathroom floor and laying down new linoleum. (When our hens fall short, Glen provides our eggs!)

Frances Smith & Anne Brown: Tim led volunteers on service days to help local farmers.

Wellspring: volunteers went to Wellspring with MC and Rugs on the October group weeks and helped Fred and Scarlett with the various ministries they do.

Joyce and Jerry Scott: Volunteers replaced ceiling tiles in the Scott’s bathroom with Kim and Carly Ann, our resident ceiling tile expert

Praise Be!

by Eric, Director

With the opening words of his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, “Praise be to you, my Lord”, Pope Francis invited every human on the planet into a reflection on what is happening to “our common home”, how that ties into the meaning of life, and what we as Christians and stewards of this earth can do spiritually, socially, and environmentally to heal our wounded souls, communities, and world. Further, Pope Francis acknowledges:

Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to build a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

As a place where young people are welcomed home to experience the healing power of our Lord and to wonder about building a better future, we have chosen our theme this year as “Praise Be!” It is our hope that we can use this year to listen to both the earth (God’s first revelation, LS 85) and our marginalized brothers and sisters, in light of the encouragement, challenge and wisdom shared by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*.

The kind of change that Pope Francis invites us into may seem intimidating. Fortunately for us, transforming lives is written into our very mission here at Bethlehem Farm. Francis says we must start by changing hearts (LS 202), if we are ever going to be successful changing minds, lifestyles, and institutions. One of the most powerful gifts of the Bethlehem Farm experience is its ability to mold our hearts as disciples of Christ, and give us practical tools for living out our values, as we seed them to the world. However, bringing the experience back into the rest of our lives has always been the tricky part.

Toward that end, we have proposed a new program, “BtheFarm: Empowering Student Leaders in Faith” in order to complement the existing Our Sunday Visitor Catechetical Initiative. The Catechetical Team will be empowering two students from each school or parish to lead their group through our post-trip materials and general “taking home” of the Bethlehem Farm experience.

Good news! The Catholic Youth Foundation USA has awarded us \$4,000 to partially fund the program! Full program implementation will cost about \$21,000 in room and board, stipends, benefits, training and materials. Would you like to join us in this new initiative? \$500 covers theological training for catechetical team members, \$125 covers one month’s stipend for a team member, and \$30 covers a week of food for one team member. Please consider sending a donation in the enclosed envelope toward our work transforming lives and engaging youth in the Church. As always, our low-income home repair program and teaching of sustainable practices remain strong and are also growing with new initiatives. If you prefer giving toward these aspects of our mission, feel free.

Check us out online!
www.bethlehemfarm.net

Questions or Comments regarding this publication and/or article submissions can be sent to the editor, Carly Ann, at bethlehemfarm@gmail.com. Photos welcome!