



Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund

Grant Application

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Project/Program Name: "Net-Zero Sustainable Facilities Plan" and "Green Neighbors Project"

1. Provide a description of your history and your organization including mission and values. How long have you been in operation? Whom do you primarily serve? Please describe how you collaborate with others.

History

In January of 2004, a small, committed group of people associated with Nazareth Farm, a Catholic community in Doddridge County, West Virginia, felt called to create another community with the same spirit. As part of the search for a local community in need of a neighborly hand, the group formed a vision of what another farm might look like. This group envisioned creating "a center of reflection and prayer in the service of action" that would respond to the needs of its local community and live in solidarity with the people served. An early emphasis was placed on being centered on the Eucharist and open to the Spirit.

As a result of trips to eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia to meet with folks in similar ministries, a former Catholic Worker Farm was found that was to be given away. After meeting with the local Bishop, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston agreed to accept the property for the use of Bethlehem Farm. The deed was officially signed over on December 8, 2004, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

In January of 2005, the first two staff "Caretakers" moved in to establish the Bethlehem Farm community and prepare for the future growth of the community. The first group of 30 students came for a service-retreat in March of 2005. Since then, the community has grown to as many as ten Caretakers (including some families) with more than 400 volunteers per year coming through on service-retreats. As the Bethlehem Farm Caretaker intentional community has grown, so has its impact on the local community. In the beginning, groups often worked helping neighbors with simple farm and household chores, doing trail work with the National Park Service, or working with residents at the local nursing home. Now, we are capable of large-scale home repair projects, from insulating homes to replacing leaky roofs, and we have formed lasting partnerships with other local nonprofit organizations.

Bethlehem Farm celebrated 13 years of successful, transformative, financially sound ministry this December. We are always mindful of the thousands of people who have made this mission possible and more well established every year. With this solid foundation, we now seek to creatively address the need of the times by empowering our local community and national volunteers to practice sustainability through our Net-Zero and Green Neighbors projects.

Mission and Values

Bethlehem Farm is a Catholic community in Appalachia that transforms lives through serving with the

local community and teaching sustainable practices. We invite volunteers to join us in living the cornerstones of service, community, prayer, and simplicity.

The Farm community is based on the Gospels and Catholic Social Teachings, looking to the Appalachian pastoral letters *This Land is Home to Me* and *At Home in the Web of Life* as well as Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* for further inspiration and guidance. The Farm is staffed with single persons and families who have committed to build their daily lives upon the Gospel cornerstones of prayer, community, simplicity and service, while inviting high school, college and adult volunteers to join them on service-retreat weeks. The mission of Bethlehem Farm has three major components: transforming lives, serving with the local community, and teaching sustainable practices.

Transforming lives: We encourage “metanoia,” a radical change of heart and mind, in ourselves, in the volunteers that come through our doors on service-retreat weeks, and in the families with whom we work. We share the vision for our common destiny in which we care for the least among us, treat all life with utmost dignity, and exercise stewardship of Creation. It is a radical calling, a calling that requires us to die to our former ways of being and rise to something new and beautiful. We provide volunteers with diverse prayer experiences, engaging service sites, a reflective atmosphere, knowledge of Catholic Social Teachings such as Human Dignity, an introduction to simple living, and the tools to bring the experience home with them and share it with others.

Serving with the local community: Our service within the local community flows from our call to love one another. Bethlehem Farm serves our sisters and brothers primarily through home repair sites and working with local community organizations. Our work involves much more than just the physical labor. We go beyond hammering nails and painting walls and dig deep into the basic need for people to feel loved, appreciated, and connected. We emphasize working *with* people rather than *for* them, and we are always learning from one another. Community partnerships enhance our relationships and impact in the community; we collaborate with several ecumenical service organizations and environmental groups to diversify our service.

Teaching sustainable practices: We infuse the teaching of stewardship and sustainability concepts throughout our work, enabling our volunteers and wider local community to practice sustainability. We compost, garden organically, clean our house without the use of harsh chemicals, conserve electricity (we made the transition to LED lighting last year), heat primarily with an efficient double-burning wood stove, use rainwater to flush our toilets, and generate two-thirds of our electricity through solar power. In addition, this year we are hoping to add solar hot water heating to our Retreat House. We continually strive to improve our conservation efforts and explore alternative visions of a just and sustainable future.

Programs

Bethlehem Farm's main program is the Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities Program (low-income home repair), which occurs in conjunction with the Service-Retreat Week Program (volunteer service-retreat experience). Each year, about 400 high school students, college students, adults, and families come from different parts of the country for a week at a time to immerse themselves in the cornerstones of service, community, prayer, and simplicity in the context of an intentional faith-based sustainable community. During their stay, volunteers are grouped into small teams and have the opportunity to work on a different community service site each day, as well as spending one day on the Farm for the ministry of hospitality (“home crew”).

We emphasize and try to embody the connection between faith and care for our Earth. To enable volunteers to more readily see the interconnectedness of all creatures and the urgent need to live in harmony with Creation, the caretakers and volunteers together give up technology for the week and work on being present to each other and the natural splendor of Appalachia. Each day begins with morning prayer and concludes with evening prayer, and each team of volunteers is empowered to plan a unique prayer for the larger group. While our community is rooted in the Catholic tradition, we are open to and inspired by other faith traditions. Programming during the week includes an introduction to the history, mission, and vision of Bethlehem Farm; an interactive discussion of Catholic Social Teachings (like Human Dignity, Solidarity, and Care for Creation); a community night dinner with local friends and neighbors; a visit to a local evangelical church for their Wednesday evening service; and “fasting” from electricity for one evening.

Intentionality is at the core of our mission and actions. While we are on a journey and always have room to grow, we strive to model respect for creation and joyful sacrifice in recognition that our actions

reverberate around the world. Both small and big sacrifices are part of our daily life: when we use plastic bags, we wash and reuse them; we encourage volunteers to use our sawdust compost toilets rather than our flush toilets; we lead volunteers in morning chores around the farm; we eat communally, highlighting the homegrown and local foods being served, and consider shared meals to be sacred; and we reflect and pray about the sacredness of Creation and our role in being caretakers of our only Earth. Disconnecting from technology for the week can be difficult for our young adult volunteers, but by the end of the week they come to appreciate the freedom of being present and encountering each other, the divine, and our beautiful Earth. We hope that the Service-Retreat experience is a seed planted in each volunteer that will grow over time into rootedness in the Earth, awareness of our interconnectedness, and a spirit of loving sacrifice for the common good.

Bethlehem Farm's programs have the benefit of connecting two groups: our youth volunteers in need of spiritual nourishment, inspiration, and connection to what is real (rather than just virtual), and our client homeowners in need of renewal, companionship and able bodies to share work. Our program "Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities" (RHRC) primarily addresses two needs in our local community: the need for safe, warm, and dry housing conditions; and the need for connection and relationship. High poverty rates mean that people often need a helping hand when home repair or other needs arise, since there are not many local resources to draw from. Our service area also has a high percentage of elderly residents who are on fixed incomes and are unable to do the work themselves. We also see unusually high rates of disability, due to the dangerous nature of available jobs such as the coal and timber industries, the low quality of foods received from food pantries, and the low quality of medical care available. Disabled persons often need modifications made to their homes (such as wheelchair ramps) that they cannot afford and cannot physically complete on their own. Large down payments, interest-bearing loans, and the huge expense of skilled labor are simply not an option. Typically, labor charges make up half or more of the cost of a home repair project. The volunteer labor leveraged by RHRC brings home repair costs to a manageable level. RHRC allows clients to get needed home repairs while still maintaining their dignity and ability to pay for the materials over time.

2. Please describe your long-term/strategic plan. What do you see as your top 2-3 strategic needs.

Bethlehem Farm is currently engaged in implementing a master plan to be concluded in 2020. We are working towards the following goal for a better future: "By 2020, Bethlehem Farm will strengthen our organizational sustainability, through stewardship, across our core programs."

In each of our core programs, Bethlehem Farm has strategic goals for improvement which demonstrate our commitment to sustainability and care for creation. In the Core program of "Teaching Sustainable Practices," we have the goals of: further implementing sustainable practices around the farm, educating others on renewable options, and planting seeds of sustainability in our community and across the country through the **Net-Zero Sustainable Facilities Plan**; and incorporating more sustainable materials into our low-income home repair program in the **Green Neighbors Project**.

When service retreat participants, neighbors, and staff come to Bethlehem Farm, they are immersed in a "sustainable learning lab" environment. They receive hands-on education about organic gardening, healthy farming practices, conservation, energy efficiency, renewable energy and the environmental and social costs of the extraction economy, and Catholic Social Teaching. We hope Bethlehem Farm will be able to enhance this experience through: becoming net-zero energy consumers; offering hands-on interaction with green building materials and practices, exemplary safety practices, and increased educational programming; and creating structures that allow for organization, safe and proper storage of garden tools, and interactive learning.

3. Describe in detail the program, project or purpose for which you are seeking funding.

Summary

Our top priorities are the Bethlehem Farm **Net-Zero Sustainable Facilities Plan** and our **Green Neighbors Project**. A lower priority that we can describe in detail in a later proposal is the San Damiano

Fellows Program. A summary of all three projects is followed by detailed descriptions and budgets for our top two priorities.

1. Bethlehem Farm Net-Zero Sustainable Facilities Plan

We have been on a journey to walk more gently on this green Earth, as a way of demonstrating to others that creation care is within reach for everyone. We aim to implement sustainable practices ourselves, educate others on renewable options, and plant seeds of sustainability in our community and across the country. We would like to bring some pieces of our “net-zero” journey to completion with the help of the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters. In order to be “net-zero,” that is to produce as much (if not more) energy than we consume and produce as much of our own food as practical: we will create an overall plan for the sustainable design of the Bethlehem Farm property, complete the final phase of solar electric panels, complete our transition to solar hot water, build the “San Damiano Center for Sustainability” to enhance our local food production and education capacity, and install 20,000 gallons of rainwater collection.

2. Green Neighbors Project

The Green Neighbors Project aims to enable our local community to more affordably employ sustainable practices. Our low-income home repair program is well established after 13 years of formation and development. To begin the Green Neighbors Project, we recently added a Sustainable Upgrade Fund component to our low-income home repair program. The Sustainable Upgrade Fund can be used as a cost share (credit, discount, etc.) for the cost of sustainable materials above and beyond the cost that the conventional (standard, lower quality, more toxic) materials would be. We currently include non-toxic, super-insulating, durable, and/or environmentally friendly products in the Sustainable Upgrade Fund, but have limited funding with which to work. With the help of the Wheaton Franciscans, we will expand this opportunity to more families and nonprofits and also include home energy audits, deeper weatherization of homes, and renewable energy installations.

3. San Damiano Fellows Program: “Rebuild my church”

The San Damiano Fellows will participate in a three-phase program to engage Fellows in a hands-on learning process that promotes creation care in collaboration with Bethlehem Farm. The Fellows program will be targeted to young adults, but will be open to any adult. Each Fellow will prepare a research project proposal to develop some aspect of creation care under the Bethlehem Farm mission, whether on the Farm premises or out in the local community. Fellows will then spend at least 6 weeks at Bethlehem Farm serving the mission, living in intentional community, putting their proposal into action, and considering options for bringing what they have learned back to their home community. Fellows will then implement what they have learned in a creation care project at their college campuses, homes, or communities. Pre- and post-trip retreat experiences in the Franciscan tradition would be a wonderful way to acknowledge and emphasize the spiritual dimensions of creation care for the San Damiano Fellows.

Detailed Project Descriptions

1. Net-Zero Sustainable Facilities Plan

At Bethlehem Farm we continually strive to choose sustainable practices, educate others, and plant seeds of sustainability in local community members and national volunteers. It is common for participants in our program to return home and implement something learned from their experience here with us. We would like to bring some pieces of this journey to completion with the help of the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters. In order to be “net-zero,” that is to produce as much (if not more) energy than we consume and produce as much of our own food as practical, we have set the following plan:

1. Hire an architect to create an overall plan for the sustainable design of the Bethlehem Farm property, including best placement of the remaining structures, rain collection plan, green design, etc. (See exploratory conversation with an architect in the budget document.)
2. Complete phase III of solar electric (photovoltaic) panels in order to produce 100% of our electricity from the sun.

3. Complete transition of hot water heating to renewables by installing solar hot water collectors for all domestic hot water. Some heating of spaces may also be possible with heat from these solar collectors as well.
4. Construction of 24'x40' "San Damiano Center for Sustainability" to enhance our local food production capacity and teaching of sustainable practices to groups by housing the tractor, organic garden tools, organic supplements, wheelbarrows, season extension equipment, beekeeping equipment, and other garden/farm needs. Plans include installation of composting sawdust toilets off the back of the structure and gutters and downspouts for future rainwater collection. A goat shed off the eastern (orchard) side may be included as a way to transition pasture management to livestock, rather than using the fossil-fueled brush hog to maintain pastures. Some of the above tools currently sit out in the weather and are wasted through rusting and rotting, while others are currently housed farther from the gardens in a deteriorating structure with lead paint and fallen-in walls slated for demolition, so there is also a safety concern that this building would alleviate.
5. Install 18,000-gallon rainwater containment to collect rainwater from west half of Retreat House (2,968 sq. ft. roof), San Damiano Center for Sustainability (1,000 sq. ft. roof), and future 5-vehicle garage (1,800 sq. ft.), to use for laundry, toilets, food production, and livestock.

2. Green Neighbors Project

As stewards of creation and co-creators with God in its care and cultivation, we have a responsibility to consider the effect of our actions on the environment and adopt practices that sustain and promote environmental health, rather than degrade it. These Christian values have been clearly outlined in both the Appalachian pastoral letter *At Home in the Web of Life* and Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

As we have been learning more about sustainable building techniques (environmentally-friendly products, super-insulation to encourage conservation of fossil fuels and lower utility bills, high-quality durable products that will last a long time, etc.), it has become clear that using such methods can be more costly than a homeowner is capable of paying and/or more costly than they would choose (e.g., they may not want to spend the extra few hundred dollars on insulation, even if it's good for the earth OR they do not know how much they could save on future utility bills). We would like to be able to subsidize the sustainable elements of home repair and renovation for our low-income clients. For example, if it would cost \$1/sq. ft. for minimal insulation, while our preferred option of super-insulation would cost \$1.50/sq. ft., then Bethlehem Farm could give the homeowner a credit for that additional \$0.50/sq. ft. that covers the better insulation cost, above and beyond the standard material.

The Sustainable Upgrade Fund: Bethlehem Farm will budget funds each year for a "Sustainable Upgrade Fund." The fund can be used as a cost share (credit, discount, etc.) for the cost of sustainable materials above and beyond the cost that the conventional (standard, lower quality, more toxic) materials would have been. The cost share will generally not exceed 25% of the total project cost, except after discussion with the Project Coordinator and Director. All home repair clients qualify for the Sustainable Upgrade Fund and everyone who participates will be given the opportunity to contribute to the fund for future clients.

In 2017 we established the Sustainable Upgrade Fund. We opened the fund with \$5,000 from our reserve. We see an opportunity to expand upon these plans by investing more funds in the Sustainable Upgrade Fund. A high funding level will not only ensure that the fund does not get exhausted before all eligible families can participate in its current form, but would also allow us to expand the offerings of the Sustainable Upgrade Fund to include home energy audits, deeper weatherization of homes to cut down on fossil fuel use and energy bills, and renewable energy installations. One of our hopes is that if we can help transition some local neighbors and other local nonprofit organizations to renewable energy, then people may be able to see coal, natural gas and other fossil fuel extraction in a clearer light, since they'll no longer be dependent on it. Since we are already at capacity for the amount of work we can accomplish with the number of staff we have on hand, we are in the process of hiring an experienced professional in our newly created salaried position of Project Director. We will seek funding from the Raskob Foundation and others for this new position.

Sustainable materials that qualify include, but are not limited to:

- Nontoxic or less toxic materials to replace toxic materials (toxic either in production and environmental effect, in construction, or their effect on indoor air quality.)

- I.e., using ceramic tile rather than vinyl tile or zero VOC paint rather than conventional
- Materials that lead to increased weatherization through super-insulation
 - I.e., insulation in between wall studs is standard, but thicker walls and exterior foam board sheathing are recommended by Passive House and other green builders
- High quality, durable products that will extend the life of the home
 - I.e., ceramic tile instead of vinyl tile, ZIP System sheathing, instead of OSB and house wrap, Advantech-style waxed subflooring instead of standard plywood
- Environmentally-friendly or sustainable products
 - I.e., sustainably-harvested lumber, less impactful materials (bamboo over vinyl flooring)

With the help of the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund, we could also include:

- Home energy audits
 - Either in-house by newly-created Project Director or contracted out
- Assistance to carry out the recommendations of the home energy audits
 - May include case management to reduce energy use, LED lighting upgrades, sealing drafts, underpinning, etc.
- Renewable energy installations
 - Most likely solar electric panels, but may also include wind turbines or solar hot water

The Sustainable Upgrade Fund- Solar Upgrades: As stated just above, we would love to expand the Sustainable Upgrade Fund to include solar upgrades. In this program, a family would participate in a home energy audit, carry out energy conservation recommendations (with Bethlehem Farm support as appropriate), and after reducing energy consumption, be eligible for renewable energy installations like solar electric panels. Funding from the Wheaton Franciscans would be seed money for the program. In the first year, we would aim for five families to engage in the process resulting in installation of solar panels, with a total of fifteen families participating over a three-year period. Families would provide a 25% down payment for the solar install, and then pay back monthly a no-interest loan for the remainder of the costs. These payments would return to the Solar Upgrade Fund begun by the Wheaton Franciscans' support, thus creating a perpetual fund that local families pay back into for the program to continue for years to come.

We are excited for the potential of this new fund to improve the health and resilience of our local community, while also cultivating care for creation. This is especially relevant in an Appalachian community that is still dedicated to its hard-working coal miners, natural gas extractors, and timber workers. We hope to be a small but clear voice among those who live out the belief that caring for these workers and their families can happen while also trying to move beyond the use of fossil fuels. We know that caring for people and caring for the Earth are inexorably intertwined and hope to model that by our every action.

4. What percentage of your annual budget does this program, project or purpose comprise?

What percentage for operations; for staffing costs? Please attach any financial statements that will help us understand your organization.

In a projected organizational budget that includes these new project costs (spread over three years), the total project costs would be 27% of the operating budget.

Since these projects go beyond what we currently do, contracted professionals would largely provide the labor needed. Therefore, there will be no additional staffing costs for Bethlehem Farm Caretakers, rather there will be paid professionals for discrete contracted jobs.

Please see our attached year-end financial statements for fiscal year 2017, including a balance sheet and income statement. We are happy to provide any other financial reports you request.

5. Please describe your sources of short and long-term funding. Are there conditions attached to these sources of funding? Is fund development an active part of your organization?

Bethlehem Farm is funded through a combination of sources: volunteer participation fees, individual and group donations, winter benefit event income, and foundation grants.

Participation Fees: While volunteers pay a nominal fee to participate in service weeks, their fees do not cover the costs of the program, and some of the staff's time and the organization's resources currently go to fundraising. We are in the midst of implementing a new volunteer relationship management database with peer-to-peer fundraising capabilities, which would help empower our volunteers to engage their networks in funding the Service Week program.

Donations: Each year, we host another 400 Service Week participants, who get added to our database for newsletters and fundraising appeals, so we expect to see donations increase each year. We also develop stronger relationships with parishes each year, so we have reason to expect parish contributions to be maintained and perhaps even increased. Recently we completed a major capital project, which attracted a great deal of donor support. We are grateful to see this generosity being re-directed toward our programs now that the building is complete.

Winter Benefit: We hold a fundraiser in Chicago, IL each winter, graciously hosted by one of the schools that sends students for our service-retreat weeks. This event generally raises around \$10,000 and is our only regular fundraising event.

Foundation Grants: We are always looking for Catholic foundations whose purposes coincide with our mission and work. In 2017, we have received support from: The Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities; the Ray and Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust; The Blanche M. Walsh Charitable Trust; Bike and Build; The Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL, Poverty, Justice, and Peace Fund; the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling, WV; and the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary of the Woods, IN. These foundations do not attach conditions to their support, except of course that we spend the funds on what we said we would.

Development is an established part of our operations, and yet always has room for growth. To solicit donations from our support base, we send out two paper newsletters and two e-newsletters per year in addition to at least one appeal letter. We utilize social media in fundraising to some extent, and we are always looking for Catholic foundations whose purposes align with our mission. We also seek opportunities to spread the word locally about our ministry through speaking engagements, community events, and church invitations.

6. Describe in detail how you see the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund mission, values, and one or more areas of focus, align with your organization's mission, vision and values. (A copy of the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters Ministry Fund's Mission, Values and Purpose statement is attached.)

Mission

Like the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters, we strive to continually respond to the needs of the Church and the times, both with our volunteers and within our local Appalachian community. Our mission is to transform lives through service with the local community and the teaching of sustainable practices—at this time, this translates to repairing homes and enabling our local community and national volunteers to better practice sustainability. We intentionally remain open at all times to requests from the community to ensure that our resources can be best used to serve the community's needs.

Values

Like the Wheaton Franciscans, the Bethlehem Farm community believes that we are all one human family, and therefore we are committed to promoting human dignity and community development as we strive each day to live the Gospel.

"Respecting Each Person:" We teach and do our best to model Catholic Social Teaching to our volunteers, starting with the crucial building block of Human Dignity. We guide discussions and prayers centered on justice, peace, and how our faith can influence all aspects of our daily lives. We intentionally look for the best in our volunteers and clients and speak positively and kindly, choosing to accept others where they are in their journey. We strive each day to create a safe environment for positive risk-taking, courage, deepening of faith, and relationship building within our community and in the broader community. As mentioned above, we emphasize working with, not for, our clients, respecting their abilities, wisdom, and gifts, and hopefully empowering them to continue caring for their homes.

"Creating Caring, Peaceful Communities:" One of Bethlehem Farm's four Cornerstones is community.

The full-time Caretakers live in intentional Christian community year-round, and we invite our 400+ volunteers to join us during their service-week experiences. We believe and teach that caring for each other and building relationships is part of our calling as Catholics, and that by recognizing our place in many communities we become more generous, humble, and aware of human interconnectedness. Volunteers engage with us in daily household and farm chores as a reminder of “rights and responsibilities.” We hope that we give volunteers one example of a real-life Christian community, and that they return home energized to engage more deeply in justice and peace work in their own communities.

Courage: At the beginning of each service-retreat week, we speak and pray with the group about having open hearts and approaching those we serve with humility and without judgment. Appalachian stereotypes are very common in the media and it takes effort, intentionality, and courage for our volunteers to challenge their own assumptions about West Virginians and engage in dialogue with our homeowners. At the same time, we have recently hosted many volunteers with diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds at this point in history when our country is very divided and differences can make people feel vulnerable. We have in the past year seen our volunteers act with amazing courage as they encounter both unconditional love and false assumptions from our homeowners, who may not experience people of color in their daily lives and therefore may say biased or uninformed (and occasionally offensive) comments. As Caretakers, we are currently working to grow in how we guide these young adults through their experience of serving others who may not have learned to value diversity. It takes deep faith, love, and courage to serve someone without judgment who does not immediately reciprocate. Our faith calls us to this challenging form of engagement with those who are different from us, and we hope that Bethlehem Farm will continue to be a safe place to practice intentional, loving, courageous communication.

Collaboration: Bethlehem Farm partners with other service organizations to enhance our impact in the community and our volunteers’ experience. We continue to enjoy working with Wellspring of Greenbrier, Inc., a multi-service ecumenical agency, where Bethlehem Farm staff members lead groups of our volunteers as we participate in Wellspring’s own low-income home repair program. It is a great match of gifts, as Wellspring provides the experience, planning, and materials, and Bethlehem Farm provides the labor and tools for these projects. In 2015, we also began a new partnership with the Alderson Community Food Hub. The Alderson Community Food Hub is a social enterprise with a community orchard and community garden, which provides Alderson, a food desert, with fresh and healthy food. Relatedly, Sprouting Farms is an organic farm business incubator and accelerator, which serves as a teaching site for local aspiring farmers, especially those recently left behind from the coal industry. Our volunteers support these essential programs while learning about rural food insecurity and local food systems. This year we also assisted the National Park Service as well as Beyond Wishes Therapeutic Riding Program, a certified member of Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International. Uninterested in reinventing the wheel, we value listening, working together toward goals, and prioritize building relationships. We try to be good neighbors and willing servants to all who ask.

Purpose

It is clear that Bethlehem Farm and the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters are aligned in our desire to live and promote Care for Creation. Upon the release of Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*, we were both affirmed and challenged in our efforts to teach and embody the Catholic value of Care for Creation. Pope Francis elucidates what we have seen in our own experience: Earth is in a precarious position and it is the primary need of our time for the faithful to lead a reawakening to our role as stewards and protectors of Earth. As stewards of creation and co-creators with God in its care and cultivation, we have a responsibility to consider the effect of our actions on the environment and adopt practices that sustain and promote environmental health, rather than degrade it. Elucidation of this goal is probably sufficiently covered in the content above.

Bethlehem Farm’s programs also focus on caring for women and children in vulnerable situations, such as single mothers and grandmothers caring for grandchildren who need our partnership to have a safe, warm, and dry home for the children under their care.

We are quite energized as we envision the opportunities that are possible in a continued and expanded partnership with the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters. Thank you for the chance to share our vision with you.