



# **BETHLEHEM FARM**

## **CARETAKER INTERVIEW RESOURCES**



**UPDATED MARCH 2018**



## 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 **prayer, community, simplicity** and **service**.

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### VISION OF THE FUTURE

**We envision the purpose of Bethlehem Farm to:**

- + be a **center of reflection and prayer in the service of action**, inspired by the **Eucharist** and open to the **Spirit**.
- + **work *with* people and empower people** to address local needs, especially low-income home repair, but remaining open to God's call for us to other ministries.
- + **form a "contrast community"**<sup>1</sup> that chooses to build with God's plans in mind, rather than blindly following a culture that promotes pleasure, wealth, and power.
- + **pray** in both traditional and creative ways in order to foster spiritual growth, keep the focus on Christ, and mutually encourage one another
- + **encourage *metanoia*** in ourselves, our volunteers, and the community we serve, with emphasis on the Eucharist as a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God
- + **form an intentional Christian community** of trust, commitment, faithfulness, and challenge in the spirit of the Apostles
- + **be an authentic local community** that seeks to 'be the change we wish to see in the world'<sup>2</sup> and which, therefore, supports sustainable practices<sup>3</sup>
- + **embody genuine Catholic** beliefs to counter existing misconceptions regarding the Catholic Church and its people, letting our actions witness to our faith
- + **strive to be one Body in Christ** by pursuing ecumenical ventures and always giving a favorable interpretation to others' views as a sign of mutual respect<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Models of the Church, Avery Dulles, S.J., in The Church Emerging from Vatican II, Dennis Doyle. p.32

<sup>2</sup> quote generally credited to Mohandes Gandhi

<sup>3</sup> At Home in the Web of Life, 1995. a pastoral message on sustainable communities in Appalachia from the Catholic bishops of Appalachia. pp. 2,3,25,41-54

<sup>4</sup> The Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius Loyola, 22



## **Putting the Bethlehem Farm Vision into Practice**

by Eric Fitts

“What is the vision for Bethlehem Farm?” The question came again, this time in a conference call with an applicant considering joining our community. A smile creeps across my face: it’s dream time, a time to think with God’s plan in mind and to embrace the future with open arms!

I see our vision as a trinity, composed of three parts that complement one another. We strive to serve our local community, to transform our lives and the lives of the volunteers who join us for service weeks, and to engage in sustainable practices as stewards of God’s Creation.

We strive to be an authentic local Catholic Christian community. Our service within the local community naturally flows from our Gospel call to love one another. Fully one-quarter of the residents of Summers County live below the poverty line. We are always seeking ways that our gifts can best serve the local community, whether through low-income home repair, community gardening, working with other local nonprofits, etc. At the same time, we seek to learn from our neighbors the wisdom of working cooperatively with the land and the gift of hospitality, since we, too, are impoverished in one way or another.

We encourage “metanoia,” a radical change of heart and mind, in ourselves and in the volunteers that come through our doors on service retreat weeks. Following Christ is difficult in our self-centered culture. The Church has a 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. Volunteers leave here with a new set of eyes and some bread for the journey.

We strive to infuse the teaching of sustainability concepts throughout our work while inviting our volunteers and wider local community to practice sustainability. We currently compost, garden organically, clean our house without the use of harsh chemicals, conserve electricity (most recently by transitioning to LED lighting), use rainwater to flush our toilets, produce most of our electricity and some of our hot water from the sun using solar panels, have chickens for eggs and keep bees for honey production and we hope to continue to grow in sustainable practices over time. By exploring alternative visions of a sustainable future, we seek to apply the Gospel to our present situation.



## Responsibilities and Expectations of Caretakers

**Unity:** All members of the community are called to be one mind and one heart, to be of one accord and to support the actions, rules, and decisions of the community, to be one in love, support and respect of one another in the community. All conflicts are to be resolved in this spirit of unity.

**Sharing:** Because of this unity and accord, all members are called to share their gifts and talents with the community and to share their ideas, dreams, and visions, to contribute to the discussion and planning and to help the community reach the decisions concerning all aspects of the community life.

**Fidelity to the Church:** Community membership is open to Christians of deep personal faith who are open to the Catholic tradition. We are a community called to acknowledge and express our faith and commit themselves, thereby, to membership and mission for the sake of God's Kingdom in history. This mission includes the proclamation of the Kingdom by our words and lives and a living witness to that Kingdom to all the community members, to the volunteers and to the low income people of the area.

**Prayer:** All members of the Community are called to share in all exercises of community prayer, usually including periodic days of reflection and other prayer experiences. Prayer is essential to the growth of the community; therefore, it will always be a central part of the spirit of the farm. Community members must have a desire to grow with the community.

**Simplicity:** All members of the community are expected to strive for a life of simplicity according to the call of the Gospel. This involves a lifestyle of sharing and requires a spirit of detachment from possessions, clothing, money, food, alcohol, and other related things. The day-to-day living out of this call will be done on both an individual and a community basis which will be decided by the community itself.

**Work:** All members of the Community are expected to share in the work of the community and to be responsible for the work assigned them by the community according to their talents and abilities.

**Chastity:** Bethlehem Farm affirms that sexuality is God's good gift to humankind. We understand that single Caretakers come to the farm and may fall in love. We encourage those community members to prayerfully discern how each relationship can support their vocation and bring them closer to God. We support a lifestyle of chastity for single volunteers and married couples. Bethlehem Farm Caretakers are expected to refrain from any exclusive or intimate interactions with volunteers during group weeks. These expectations are consistent with the Biblical witness and the needs of the community.

**Accountability:** All members of the community are called to be accountable to each other, both individually and collectively. We must be mindful of the responsibilities placed upon us by the community and to be accountable for those responsibilities. Community members are to openly and honestly challenge and be challenged by each other in a way that offers the opportunity for growth as persons, Christians and community members.



## Caretakers Can Expect:

**Mutual support and affirmation** from all the members of the community.

**A share in the decision making of the community** according to the experience, wisdom, talents, knowledge and type of commitment of the member.

**To be evaluated** openly and honestly in a community of compassion, trust, and growth.

**Reasonable use of the material goods of the community**, including such things as automobiles, food, and other things as the needs arise.

**To be invited and to openly invite others to live the Eucharist** to follow the example of Christ by sharing in this meal together.

The intangibles are more difficult to express precisely, yet in some ways are more important for the formulation and growth of the community than any of the more tangible items listed above.

**Joy and Peace in Community** together with the other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**Thanksgiving** - We are thankful for God's call to live and serve in the community and for those with whom we are called to serve - community members, volunteers and the people of the area - and thankful for the many aspects of community and most of all for the presence of God in our lives in community.

**Gift/Sacrifice** - We are a gift to each other and are called to die to self and be willing to give of ourselves to each other. We do this by striving to love unconditionally.

**Enrichment** - As nourishment for one another we must read and pray so that we might be enriched in order to enrich others in our community.

**Healing Presence** - All of us are wounded and in need of healing. All members of the community are called to be "Wounded Healers" who minister with compassion, openness and honesty.

As a community, we are called to expect God to work powerful miracles in us and through us as we allow ourselves to be changed.

## CARETAKER COMPENSATION

*Stipends should:*

- *Reflect commitment to org (go up over length of commitment)*
- *Encourage simplicity of lifestyle, using first 12 months as a formation period to learn how to live a sparing-sharing Gospel lifestyle on a modest stipend*
- *Allow some payment of student loans*
- *Allow ability to save for retirement for long-term members*
- *Allow for savings (for transition or for a vehicle upon leaving, for grad school, for children's education, for down payment on first home)*
- *Allow for some travel (weddings, funerals, holiday)*
- *Reflect individual needs (living wage), being consistent and fair within reason*
- *Allow for some individual almsgiving*
- *Avoid forcing people to move on for reasons of financial hardship*

**Caretaker stipend structure (net amounts after payroll taxes are paid):**

First 12 months: \$125/mo  
After completion of 12 months: \$187.50/mo (\$225/mo including retirement match)  
After completion of 18 months: \$250/mo (\$300/mo including retirement match)  
After completion of 24 months: \$312.50/mo (\$375/mo including retirement match)  
After completion of 36 months: \$375/mo (\$450/mo including retirement match)  
After completion of 60 months: \$500/mo (\$600/mo including retirement match)  
There is an additional \$100 per month dependent stipend for each child of a Caretaker couple.

**Retirement Contribution Match:** up to 20% of stipend beginning at 12 months  
(may be used for loan repayment instead)

**Travel Stipend:** \$250/fiscal year

**Education Awards:** \$5,815 AmeriCorps Education Award available for up to 2 years, pending funding and eligibility.

**Student Loan Repayment:** if no AmeriCorps positions available, then up to \$125/mo. available for student loan payments that cannot be reduced. Loan repayment is solely for educational loans that existed before the Caretaker's start date and must be applied for by the Caretaker and approved by the Director.

**Training & Development Funds:** \$500/fiscal year

**Childcare benefit:** Families have \$2,500/yr/child (up to \$5,000/yr) available for childcare and tuition expenses.

**Store Credit:** Each Caretaker receives \$25 in BF Store credit each December 1<sup>st</sup>. Caretakers are asked to wear BF t-shirts when greeting groups on Sunday evening of group weeks.

**Health Insurance**

Bethlehem Farm provides medical, dental and vision insurance, valued at ~\$560/mo (in 2018).

Bethlehem Farm will cover all out-of-pocket expenses (deductibles and co-pays) for the medical insurance, as long as the claim is covered under our plan. Caretakers handle all out-of-pocket expenses for dental and vision. Caretakers are expected to have medical and dental check-ups before arriving at the Farm.

**Use of Bethlehem Farm Vehicles**

Caretakers have access to Farm vehicles for personal use, in consultation with the community, unless needed for business use within a 300-mile round trip.

**Room and Board (Valued at \$620/mo)**

Caretakers receive their own bedroom Caretaker Residence. When Caretakers are residing at the Farm, all meals are included, within certain parameters. All utilities provided (electric, heat, landline phone/internet).

***Value of Total Annual Stipend + Benefits Available***

First 12 months: \$16,435 (plus possible \$5,815 Education Award = \$22,250)  
After completion of 12 months: \$17,635 (plus possible \$5,815 Education Award = \$23,450)  
After completion of 18 months: \$18,535 (plus possible \$5,815 Education Award = \$24,350)  
After completion of 24 months: \$19,435 (plus possible \$200/mo loan stipend = \$21,835)  
After completion of 36 months: \$20,335 (plus possible \$200/mo loan stipend = \$22,735)  
After completion of 60 months: \$22,135 (plus possible \$200/mo loan stipend = \$24,535)



## **Bethlehem Farm Caretaker Description**

### **Definition**

With the supervision of the Bethlehem Farm Director (or his/her designee) and accountable to the Caretaker Community, Caretakers serve as service retreat leaders, coordinate work sites, interact with volunteer groups during their visit to Bethlehem Farm and assume other roles and responsibilities as needed by the community.

### **General Duties & Responsibilities**

- Participates in Caretaker meetings
- Plans prayer as assigned
- Coordinates work sites as assigned
- Maintains upkeep and repair of buildings and farm grounds
- Interacts with adult & youth volunteers, participating in all aspects of group weeks as a role model
- Maintains professional boundaries
- Performs regular self and group evaluations with the guidance of Community Facilitator
- Upholds Christian standards and values as described in "Responsibilities of Community Members" in the Bethlehem Farm Community Handbook

### **Work site Duties and Responsibilities**

- Teaches basic construction skills to volunteers
- Supervises volunteers at work sites
- Plans daily work schedules and completion of work at work sites
- Maintains and ensures safety at work sites
- Builds and maintains positive rapport with families
- Responsible for the pickup, use, and return of all materials equipment, and supplies associated with the work sites
- Maintains lists of all materials used while on site

### **Qualifications**

- Willingness to work under a variety of situations and weather conditions
- Ability to follow directions and work well with others
- Basic knowledge of construction tools and the safe use and proper care of them
- Open to collaborative ministry with volunteers and the people of the area
- Open to living a close committed community life
- A person of faith open to the Catholic tradition
- Some experience in youth/young adult ministry
- A working knowledge and belief in Catholic social teachings
- Open to prayer, simplicity, and living in community
- Desire a minimum of a one year commitment



## Overview of Caretaker Roles

**Animal Care:** responsible for regular care and feeding of all Farm animals

**Auto Mechanic/Maintenance:** responsible for the general maintenance and purchasing of vehicles

**Catechetical Coordinator:** responsible for pre-trip, group week, and post-trip prayers and resources for groups to more fully integrate the Gospel cornerstones into the lifestyle of participants

**Community Facilitator:** responsible for conflict resolution, conducting Caretaker check-ins

**Community Outreach:** responsible for the coordination of community night events, community development, and public relations

**Development Officer (Grants Team, Benefit Auction Committee):** coordinates fundraising efforts, donor relations, grant writing, grants management, and the annual benefit auction fundraiser

**Director:** responsible for all administrative aspects of BF and its programs including supervision of Caretakers and volunteers; serves as the Board's liaison to the Caretaker community in the implementation of the mission of the Farm and is accountable to the Board for the decisions and actions of the Caretaker community.

**Farm Gardener:** responsible for the planning and maintenance of the Farm Garden

**Facilities Manager:** responsible for the upkeep and repair of Farm buildings and grounds

**Hiring Coordinator:** responsible for the coordination of possible Caretaker and Summer Servant applicants

**Home Repair Site Leader:** leads crews on home repair sites during group weeks

**Home School Teacher:** provides education for the children of Caretakers, if chosen over local schools

**House Manager:** coordinates the use and upkeep of the farm house, meal preparation, and planning, and oversees daily chores of the facility. Also responsible for supervising home crews and maintaining a clean and healthy home environment.

**Newsletter Editor:** responsible for creating and coordinating 2-4 BF newsletters per year and facilitating other bulk mailings

**Office Manager:** responsible for the management of the Farm office including bookkeeping, correspondence, and administrative support

**Project Coordinator:** gives direction to fellow Caretakers in their role as work site coordinators, and is responsible for projects of the farm and coordination of worksite assessment, implementation and documentation

**Retreats and Spirituality Coordinator:** provides for the spiritual growth and direction of the Caretaker community, leads Caretakers in offering retreat opportunities for youth or adults

**Social Worker:** assists Bethlehem Farm clients and in utilizing local social services

**Storehouse Mgr:** responsible for storehouse operations and cottage industry management

**Sustainability Coordinator:** coordinates existing sustainability efforts, researches innovative ways to pursue sustainability, and helps educate Caretakers and volunteers about sustainability

**Volunteer Coordinator:** serves as a liaison between Bethlehem Farm and the volunteer groups

**Web Manager:** Updates and maintains Bethlehem Farm website and other media as needed





## Loan Stipend Repayment Policy

### Goals for new policy:

Our guiding principle is to make this lifestyle possible for Caretakers for as long as they feel called to this work and for financial considerations not to force anyone to leave (to provide a living wage), while maintaining a simplicity of lifestyle and working within our budget.

The original intent of the loan stipend was to make loan payments for Caretakers who did not have enough Bethlehem Farm income to pay student loans. In light of the growing burden that student loans have become (in interest accumulation alone), it is time to look anew at the loan repayment policy, especially in anticipation of a time when AmeriCorps Education Awards may not be available.

The existing policy includes several steps aimed at reducing the interest being charged in the monthly payment for those who cannot or do not seek forbearance or deferment. Some people choose not to defer or forbear, so they can begin making qualifying payments for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF, see link below). Income-based repayment (IBR) may decrease required monthly payments to a minimal amount (possibly \$0 for a beginning Caretaker's low annual income). At some loan institutions this may result in the government paying the interest on the loan for a few years and/or can allow Caretakers to make loan payments above and beyond the minimum payment, which can reduce the principal or decrease the amount of interest capitalized onto the principle.

For more information see:

Income-based Repayment:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-driven>

Public Service Loan Forgiveness:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service#qualifying-employment>

Note: There are special rules that allow borrowers who are AmeriCorps or Peace Corps volunteers to use their Segal Education Award or Peace Corps transition payment to make a single "lump-sum" payment that may count for up to 12 qualifying PSLF payments.

After any available AmeriCorps terms are served and awards are applied to the loan, the Caretaker will receive the full loan stipend, which they can apply to monthly payments and to reduce principal if their payment is less than the full stipend. It is important to note that Caretakers also receive increases in their regular stipend, which gives them flexibility to make personal choices, such as paying a student loan or other debt down quicker than the monthly payment, setting aside more for retirement, maintaining a vehicle, etc. At the same time, Bethlehem Farm cannot be held responsible for how much each person decided to invest in themselves for education, so there may be some needs that are greater than the Farm can handle, whether due to insufficient funding or due to concerns regarding fairness in compensation.

The result of the new policy should be:

--all Caretakers with student loans will either:

- be AmeriCorps members and receive an AmeriCorps Education Award (at least \$5,815/yr for up to two years, pending available positions)
- OR
- receive a \$200/mo loan stipend until their student debt is repaid or their service ends, regardless of how low they were able to get their monthly payment, the type of student loan, the generosity/flexibility of their lender, deferment status, etc.

**New loan stipend policy:**

*Bethlehem Farm will supplement a Caretaker's regular monthly stipend with a \$200/mo student loan stipend under the following circumstances:*

- 1) All AmeriCorps terms available to the Caretaker have been completed*
- 2) Any available AmeriCorps Education Awards have been used to pay down the loan*
- 3) Verification of payment on the loan is provided to the Director on a monthly basis*

*Caretakers with monthly payments above \$200/mo or with a compelling reason for special accommodation may petition the Board for a higher loan stipend.*

*This policy shall be reviewed annually.*

*Note: AmeriCorps Education Awards may be available for Caretakers for up to two year-long terms, pending award of slots through High Rocks Educational Corp. or other organizations. Bethlehem Farm pays a \$6,000 cost share for each Full-Time AmeriCorps Member. This \$6,000 is more than a beginning Caretaker's stipend would normally cost Bethlehem Farm, but we participate in the program so Caretakers have access to the generous Education Award benefit. AmeriCorps Members receive a stipend from High Rocks that exceeds the stipend amounts agreed to by all Caretakers, since it includes funds for room and board, so Bethlehem Farm AmeriCorps Members agree to reserve their agreed-upon stipend from their High Rocks paycheck and then pass the remaining funds on to Bethlehem Farm as room and board.*



## **Parental Leave and Child Care Policy**

### **Goals for child care policy:**

Our guiding principle is to support the mission of Bethlehem Farm by making this lifestyle possible for Caretakers for as long as they feel called to this work. We seek a community where:

financial considerations do not to force anyone to leave (to provide a living wage), while maintaining a simplicity of lifestyle and working within our budget;

workloads are reasonable and sustainable, taking into account personal and family obligations, such as child care, when setting expectations for work hours;

children and parents are welcome and contribute to the mission in age-appropriate ways that allow for a healthy balance between parenting responsibilities and work responsibilities;

the Caretaker Community has the flexibility to find the best balance for everyone involved, while remaining accountable to the mission, to one another, and to the board;

the vulnerable among us, such as children, are given the greatest care and attention, including opportunities for education and enrichment, as well as attention to their changing needs;

measures are taken to retain experienced Caretakers;

volunteers are given examples of service and Christian witness as a lifestyle, lived out by a diverse community of single people, married couples, and families with children;

there are clear expectations of parents and the community as a whole as they navigate the balance between Farm work and child care;

conditions of this policy may be modified with review of the Caretaker Community and Board of Directors.

### **Parental Leave:**

Upon the birth of a child, 6 weeks of paid leave per employed parent is granted regardless of time served as a Caretaker.

Unpaid leave, with partial benefits, is available for the first year after birth for non-vested employees, with the option to request a second year of unpaid leave from the executive committee. Partial benefits include: dependent child stipend, health insurance, room and board, child care reimbursement, staff recreation, staff retreat, travel stipend, trainings offered to the staff as a whole, and Farm store credit; partial benefits do not include: professional development or retirement matching. Retirement matching is included in partial benefits (see Child Care Leave section), but does not apply in the case of unpaid leave, since there is no stipend with unpaid leave and retirement matching is based on a percentage of the base stipend.

Employees with a minimum of 24 months continuous service prior to the expected date of the child's birth are granted 16 weeks paid leave per employed parent.

The first two weeks shall be taken in full days by each parent or forfeited, but the remaining weeks may be shared between parents and/or taken in half days. Leave may begin prior to the birth, as needed by the couple. Leave time not taken before the child turns 3 years old shall be forfeited.

Parents shall advise the Caretaker Community one month in advance of their plans for taking parental leave and keep the community informed as adjustments are made to that plan.



### Child Care Leave:

Employees with a minimum of 24 months continuous service with children not currently in school may:  
take full child care leave (20% of stipend),  
work  $\frac{1}{4}$ -time (40% of stipend),  
work  $\frac{1}{2}$ -time (60% of stipend) or  
work  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time (80% of stipend).

Partial benefits are included in child care leave. The percentage of professional development benefit available will correspond to the percentage of time worked (0% for full leave, 25% for  $\frac{1}{4}$ -time, 50% for  $\frac{1}{2}$ -time, and 75% for  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time.) Childcare leave benefits are available for one year renewable terms. Each employee parent on full or partial childcare leave can renew their leave annually, pending review by the Caretaker Community.

[Note: The dependent child stipend is intended to cover the regular costs associated with caring for children. As the number of children in a family increases, the time necessary for leave increases, so the base stipend decreases, but the dependent child stipend added with each child should lessen the impact of the decrease in base stipend and enable for the care of the children, even if the family also has to tighten up in some other areas.]

When both parents are employed, the equivalent of at least one full time position should be covered between the two parents.

Parents shall advise the Caretaker Community one month in advance of their plans for taking child care leave and keep the community informed as adjustments are made to that plan. As usual, comp time may be used or contributed to if actual hours do not meet or exceed planned work time.

If the Caretaker Community wishes to hire parents with small children who will need a part-time work situation within their first 24 months, then they may waive the vesting requirement. As it stands, the policy is meant to *retain* existing Caretakers and provide for a sustainable living situation for Caretakers staying longer term.

## Making Communal Discernments

### Some Pre-requisites:

- 1.) A deep desire to come to know God's will
- 2.) Requires trust and confidence that our God is alive and actively working in our lives laboring with him, and we with him on mission. Believe that we can know the will of our Creator and trust that the Holy Spirit can guide us in the process.
- 3.) Competency in the area of concern
  - A. Are you addressing the arena of your competency/ authority?
  - B. Are the roles and responsibilities clear to everyone? Staff/Board/ Committees. When are we charged with decision making responsibility, consulting, making recommendations.

### Dispositions or Attitudes for Undertaking Communal Discernment

1. Prayer. Contemplating the heart and mind of Christ through the gospels
2. Freedom from Prejudgments
3. Indifference to all but God's will
4. Readiness to seek counsel from others
5. Trust of Each other

Do we trust the others in the group to honestly and genuinely seek God's will, trust their love of God and the people of God?

We have to ask and openly say: that we trust the others in the group to do the best that they can through prayer and meditation, self examination, renunciations of prejudgments and of self centered fears and desires to become open to the Holy Spirit and to be instruments of the Spirit for the whole group.

### Four Stages

1. Reaching Openness to the Holy Spirit
  - A. Do I clearly understand the concrete issue and the particular alternatives to be evaluated as these are formulated in the proposals or questions for deliberation? Am I reasonably well informed?
  - B. Have I, in my regular prayer or at the time of preparation for this discernment, been contemplating Jesus and His teaching so that I can look at the alternatives in the light of Christ, with his mind and his affections?
  - C. Have I achieved freedom of spirit, at least in regard to the particular alternatives about which the deliberation is concerned: freedom from pre-judgments, freedom from the inhibiting influence of any desire for or fear of an alternative except in so far as it more helps or hinders the achievement of what is for the greater praise and service of God?
  - D. Have I prayed intensely that God will preserve the right dispositions in us all or create them where they are lacking; that he will enlighten our minds to see what he wants us to see, to reason as he wants us to, that he will move our affections toward that which He wills we should desire and choose?

- E. Do I have faith in God to surely lead us to know his will if we do our best? Is my faith ultimately in him alone, not in any human ability or effort except in so far as He calls us to use these and chooses to work through them?
- F. Do I trust the other participants to be free in spirit as best they can and open to God in prayer? Am I therefore ready to listen to them as to those through whom the Holy Spirit will influence my thoughts and affections for his purpose?
- G. As a consequence of my trust in God, and in my fellow discerners, do I accept beforehand as God's will whatever the group decides, is God's will—even though I may not be intellectually satisfied with the reasons on which they base their decision?
- H. What is my spiritual tone now as we begin: consolation (sense of God's loving presence, intensification of faith in him, of love for him and for others in him, consequent sense of spiritual peace. Contentment. Etc.), or spiritual desolation (contrary of consolation) or neither consolation nor desolation but only calm? Merely note how you are now and keep reflectively attentive to this spiritual tone as the deliberation unfolds.

## 2. Clarifying The Issue

- A. What are the unspoken underlying issues
- B. Becoming More Knowledgeable about it.  
What are the alternatives?

## 3. Clear and Concise formulation of the question or proposal to be discerned

- A. Defining the terms and explanation of the question
- B. Private prayer and time to list pros and cons.
- C. Reconvene to share prayer experience
- D. Private and Prayerfully each searches for reasons
- E. Group convenes to hear and discuss, and ask clarifying questions

## 4. Communal Tentative Judgment

- A. Prayer for confirmation
- B. Prayers of Thanksgiving

# Covenant of Cooperation

Last edited 5-10-2018

*The following five principles are the tools which members of the Bethlehem Farm Community agree to use to better communicate. From these principles, are derived useful structures that assist us in addressing conflict and facilitate positive, effective communicating.*

## **Part 1: Basic Agreements**

### **1. Spirit of Abundance**

I want a cooperative relationship with you. I will act in this relationship on the assumption that there will be enough of what we really need to grow, solve our problems, support each other's deepest needs, and participate in the building of God's empowering life between us.

I agree to act on the belief that the most important things in our life together will be most available if we cooperate, and that cooperating is the best way to work together.

I act on the belief that cooperating leads to more abundance than does either competition or compromise.

Cooperation is part of the Good News. With this Good News I can commit to you: I choose to act towards you on the belief that in our life together there is the power to transform and heal. I commit to act in ways that enable those experiences that seem threatening to our relationship to be transformed into something enlivening and renewing for us.

### **2. No Secrets about our Relationship**

I commit to share with you my feelings, my wants, and my appreciations for you around those issues relevant to our relationship. I will not "vent" or gossip about you to other community members—I will bring my concerns straight to you. I will remove myself from conversations that turn to gossip.

Key to this agreement is recognizing that it is safe to work on our relationship and share with one another our wants, blocks, and appreciations.

In living a "No Secrets" relationship with you I commit to:

- Share my honest intentions
- Share my blocks (Fears and resentments)
- Express my appreciations and share my own points of pride
- Refrain from "venting" and gossiping

### **3. No Power Plays**

I will ask for what I seek in this relationship in a straightforward and clear manner and I will act on the assumption that you will do the same.

I value my own and your ability to cooperate and I honor any agreements we have made.

Conflict can arise when:

- One person seeks to attain their wants through manipulating, yelling, withdrawing, passive-aggression, or appealing to some special authority to support their wants over another's.
- Some person or group claims a special privilege that has not been clearly defined or agreed upon (E.g. Caretaker roles do give each person authority in certain matters, but tenure does not give automatic authority.)
- The majority rules.

### **4. Equal Rights**

I will act towards you respecting that your feelings, thoughts, and wants are equal to mine in worth and importance. I will assume that you have an equal right to express your feelings and seek what you want in this relationship. I assume that we have equal responsibility to attend to one another's concerns and will support the other as we seek our goals.

I want to clearly understand and agree upon the differing tasks and responsibilities we each may have in the relationship and act respectfully and cooperatively in light of our agreements.

Conflict can arise when:

- There is not an agreement/clarity regarding responsibilities and/or decision-making authority (E.g. Caretaker roles do give each person authority in certain matters, but tenure does not give automatic authority.)
- Needs and desires are not clearly expressed to another.
- One or the other really does not believe the other person's values, ideas, or beliefs are of equal dignity and importance.
- The need to be correct invalidates others feelings.

### **5. No Rescues**

I value our relationship more than I value accomplishing tasks. I will not act in this relationship in ways which generate resentment towards you. I will not do for you anything that I feel resentful about.

I assume that you will do what you say. If you cannot or do not want to follow through on something you agreed to, I allow you to take responsibility to ask for help or a change. I will not take over your responsibilities without talking with you. If it is something I believe to be too important to wait (e.g.



animal chores) and I cannot find you, then I will talk to you about it later to resolve any resentments. If I have a concern that you are not going to do what you agreed to, I will agree to bring up this concern as a fear or resentment directly with you.

I promise to directly to communicate if *I feel* you are not doing something well, quickly, or efficiently. I promise to not foster any resentments if your pace or method does not align with my own. If I am teaching you, I will be clear about what needs to be a certain way vs. what is my personal preference.

- This agreement does not rule out acts of love and support, acts of spontaneous and creative surprise, or acts of gifting on another. In fact, a “no rescue” relationship provides a healthy atmosphere for these acts of fresh and generous giving.
- The fact that I commit “not to do anything for you that I feel resentful about” is supported by the fact that I have agreed to “No Secrets in our relationship” with you, specifically, “I will bring up any feelings of resentment that arise and block our relationship.”

**The primary form of conflict resolution in our community is one-on-one conversation with the people involved. Our weekly meeting can be utilized for situations in which something prevents one from speaking straight to the person, or for matters that concern the whole group.**

## **Part 2: Sharing Blocks, Fears, and Resentments**

### **Blocks to Cooperation**

A “block” is any feeling, thought, attitude, baggage, or practical circumstance that I experience dominating my attention and concern as I am about to engage in some aspect of our relationship. The block may be an experience toward another person, toward myself, toward the group, or even toward the physical aspects of the situation.

In the cooperative relationship and the specific agreement on “No Secrets”, I promise that I will not keep secrets from you about those issues and concerns that are blocking me in relationship with you. I will share and actively deal with my blocks. I may need time to process before sharing with you, and I recognize that this will affect engaging in problem-solving, discussing, planning, working, or playing together with you, so this will not become an excuse to prolong that process beyond reason.

Two emotions most likely indicating that I am blocked are:

### **Fear and/or Resentment**

It is necessary to express and work on these blocks in a way that is mutually respectful and empowering. It is important to practice these processes, as unnatural as they may seem at times, in order to convert blocks into occasion and moments of real human relationship.

The very things that are hurdles and obstacles to our living in cooperation become vehicles for an even deeper richness in our relationships. For in sharing my fears, resentments, and concerns in a way that is empowering, I make myself available for intimacy and may be gifted with the same from others.

People are often very surprised or even ashamed or angry when they find out how unnatural and difficult it may be to actually practice and share our fears and resentments. What at first glance seems so healthy and natural an experience often becomes very painful and confusing. Few places or experiences in our past, whether our culture, our family, our early peer groups, our schooling, or our early religious community gave us the permission, trust skills, and modeling for effective, empowering self-revelation and discovery.

### **What are Fears?**

Fear is when I perceive that something bad is about to happen or could happen to me or to another. My attention is focused, either very directly or somewhat distractedly, on this bad outcome.

When I experience these fears in our relationship, I promise to attend to and share them with you in the way discussed below.

### **Notes on the Process for Sharing Fears**

When sharing a fear:

- Ask if the other is ready to hear your fear
- Be as clear as you can about the bad thing you are afraid will come to you
- Be as clear as you can about what reassurances you are wanting. Reassurances are statements which indicate what would help unblock the relationship for you around this issue.

*"I have a fear (concern) that I'd like to share with you. Could you give me "grains of truth" and reassurances about it?"*

When hearing or receiving a fear:

- Be clear that you are wanting and able to hear the fear at this time.
- Respond to the fear using this order:
  - A. Grains of Truth: These are statements expressing how I can see or understand why you might have such a fear or concern
  - B. Reassurance: The person hearing the fear responds honestly and specifically to that reassurance. Reassurances are honest expressions of my intent and my commitment to act in a certain way in regards to our ongoing relationship.
- Check if the person is ready to go on or needs more specific reassurances.

Our agreement is to hear each other's fear, not to assume responsibility for it. We agree to hear the fear and regard it from the other person's perspective as best we can and provide reassurances as honestly and cooperatively as we can.

Response from the other person:

*"What is true about your fear is..."*

*"The reassurances I can give you are..."*

When receiving another's fear check out if the person who shared the fear is ready to move on or if there are other reassurances wanted.

(Note: if the other person does not agree to hear the fear at this time, it is essential to set a time when they will. In some cases you may want to set aside the present agenda until you have been able to share it.)

Example of Sharing a Fear:

- I experience a fear:  
"I'm afraid you won't get the car back at noon like you said you would."
- Clarify what I perceive is the bad thing that might happen to me:  
"I will miss a dental appointment and have to wait 3 months to re-schedule"
- So I say to you:  
"I'd like to check out a fear I have with you. Is that okay?"

*"I'm afraid that you will not be back by noon and I will miss my dentist appointment. Can you tell me what is true about my fear and give me a reassurance, specifically that you can be back by noon?"*

- Response from the person hearing the fear:
  - A. Give "grains of truth" (validation):
    - *"It is true that I have been late before." "I may not be allowing enough time given the traffic at that time of day." "Last week someone did the same to me and I missed an important meeting."*
  - B. Give Reassurances:
    - *"I will cut down the number of things I was planning to do." "I'll allow an hour to return so I'm sure to be back here before noon."*
- Check out whether both of you are ready to move on, or if other reassurances are wanted.

### **What are Resentments?**

Resentment is a lingering feeling of frustration or irritation toward another person. When I have resentments I am less capable of being cooperative. Therefore, I agree to share with you those resentments that I experience between us and I agree I will do so in the manner agreed upon as stated below.

Anger and resentment usually indicate that I am experiencing myself as frustrated in some goal or expectation. It is most likely that I have some conscious or unconscious judgment as the reason/cause.

Resentments can be a valuable resource for helping us discover, own, and reaffirm or change our judgment. Often the judgment is noticeable in the language that we use when we share resentments.

### **Notes on the Process of Sharing Resentments**

#### **1. Sharing the resentment:**

*"I have a resentment. Are you willing to hear it?"* (Get a clear yes or no)

- If "yes", go on to the next step
  - If "no", make it clear when you both will have time to address this matter.
2. *"When you... (state words or actions you observed) I feel... (angry, sad, disappointed, frustrated, etc.)"*

#### **3. Receiving a resentment:**

Paraphrase back what you heard. *"When you saw me do..., you felt..."*

4. When both are sure that the resentment is clear then set a time when you will talk more about this.

Discussing the resentment at a later time allows for a better atmosphere in which both of you can ask for and negotiate a needed or desired outcome. However, flexibility is encouraged. If both parties are

ready and willing to discuss, and/or if time is pressing (like in the middle of two group weeks), then discussing right away is also an option.

Examples of accusatory/judgment-based language to notice and avoid:

*"When you ignore my opinions and ideas, I feel angry."*

*"When you stomped on my feelings, I got angry."*

*"When you are inconsiderate and keep me awake with music, I get angry."*

### **Processing a Resentment**

- In sharing it, be "behaviorally specific":  
Tell the other person as exactly as possible what you actually observed.  
Describe the specific behaviors (words/actions) that you noticed.
- Example: *"I noticed that three times during our meeting I raised a suggestion or an idea I wanted to discuss. Each time you immediately made a suggestion of your own. When this happened, I felt frustrated."*
- After receiving it, paraphrase what you heard:  
*"I understand that each time you presented an idea at our meeting, you experience me not noticing it and, in making my own suggestions, you felt frustrated."*
- Remember – set a time for discussion

#### Additional notes:

- Do not attribute meaning to the other's behavior:  
Do not judge the meaning of the other's behavior for them. You are sharing how you respond to the specific behavior and what meaning you give to it. At a later time, ask the other person for their observations and the meaning they give to their behavior.  
*"I am wondering if you noticed the same thing happening?"*  
*"Why did my ideas not get your attention?"*
- Does the resentment reveal an underlying fear?  
Very often it does. In the example above, I may fear that you do not value my ideas as you do others; or that I don't express mine clearly enough. It is often fruitful to uncover the fear underneath the resentment and share what you are afraid will happen, rather than what you are angry about.
- "What I want is..."  
Can you say what you would like the other person to do differently? This can also be a starting point for later discussion of alternatives for solving agreed upon problems.  
*"When I make a suggestion I'd like you to respond before going on to your suggestion."*
- \Feelings of anger or resentment are part of our relationships. It is important to acknowledge that they can be very difficult to share and hear. It is good to have others available to help facilitate the expression of resentment between two people. Be sure to give each other the appropriate time and space to work through them.

## Covenant Meeting Format

Led by this week's Faith Sharing planner

**\*Reminder: The primary form of conflict resolution in our community is one-on-one conversation with the people involved. This meeting can be utilized for situations in which something prevents one from speaking straight to the person, or for matters that concern the whole group.**

- Prayer
- Brief Check-ins: This is a time to briefly say how you are coming to the meeting. This is so everyone knows how people are entering into the meeting. Are people tired, excited, carrying a lot, just had bad news, energized, etc.? This takes out some of the second guessing and hidden agendas.
- Short reflection time to think: about 30 seconds
- Open up space to discuss:
  - Blocks, Fears, and Confessions: This is a time to share blocks and fears. Blocks can be with a person, situation, or thing that inhibits you from entering fully into the meeting. It could be a personality conflict, anger about a person or situation, a bad feeling about something, something that you are carrying with you that you keep thinking about.
  - Appreciations and Points of Pride: This is the time to acknowledge any appreciations that you have for another person or for the group and any points of pride you have for yourself.
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