

Mark Your Calendar!

**December 10
at 8 PM EST**

Our Annual
Virtual Benefit

**RSVP online at
bethlehemfarm.net/
winterbenefit**

More Than Just a Phrase

By Emma, *Volunteer and Summer Servant*

Cell service returned to my phone half an hour after heading home from my spring break service trip to the Farm. I ignored the texts and instead googled “Bethlehem Farm.” Thirty minutes later, my application to return as a Summer Servant was ready for submission. This is the joy of Bethlehem Farm—the nearly instantaneous transition into a life that becomes incredibly difficult to leave. A place where “Welcome Home” is more than just a phrase.

Living in the city, I had begun to feel such a separation from myself and creation. I wanted

to get my hands dirty, be inspired by like-minded people, and unplug. I experienced so much more than this! As a Summer Servant, home crew allowed me to witness firsthand the growth of each person who visited the Farm. I loved nothing more than watching my new friends develop confidence in their relationships with each other and their faith. Being able to welcome crews after a day of work with a home-cooked meal showed me the joy of self-gift every evening, just as group prayer demonstrated the unique gifts of each volunteer every morning.

Appalachia allowed me to ground myself in the environment, turning my faith into action. I learned how to make rhubarb strawberry crisp for thirty people, how to build a sawdust toilet, and how to love with more of myself than ever before. I felt like I was finally making a difference. My love of nature manifested in discussions about earth and sustainability that left me with concrete ideas on how to better implement the cornerstones in my own community. Most importantly, I recognized the distinction between living on Earth and living with Earth.

I experienced most vividly the cornerstone of community as I was leaving the Farm. A flat tire delayed my departure. Caretakers and Summer Servants immediately came together to help me, changing my tire with the spare, packing me lunch, offering up their families’ houses for the night, and asking me to let them know when I got home safe. The kindness and selflessness of everyone I met on the Farm is such a clear example of people living their faith – one that has inspired me to carry a more intentional mindset into every day of my life.

- Eye protection
 - Kitchen Washcloths
 - Luci brand Solar Lanterns
 - Postage Stamps
 - Oscillating Fans
 - Bed Pillows
 - Ear Protection
 - Makita Orbital Sander
 - Wood Stove Top Fan
- Check out our online tool registry...
bethlehemfarm.net/
wish-list

WISH LIST

Cookies, Cakes, and Camaraderie

By Anna, *Caretaker*

This summer we worked with Bobbie and her daughter Catherine. High school and family week volunteers helped replace her gutters, fascia, and soffit, in addition to building new front porch steps to improve accessibility. Catherine shared that our service will have a long-term impact on their lives “especially with the guttering and all that, the house was starting to look run down. Not only did it make it look a hundred times better, but it also prevents rain from rotting the outside walls of the house. The steps were actually falling away from the porch so that was a safety issue.”

Catherine is a fabulous baker and shared this talent with us each day as we worked on their home. She shared with us that Bobbie “likes different people coming in so she can talk with them and just hang out.” Catherine also enjoyed meeting the community. She said, “I had a blast! I just baked to my heart’s content and gave it away! I really enjoyed working with all of you guys at the Farm and actually going up there and socializing.”

Volunteers loved working on this site, not just for the sweet treats, but also because of the hospitality and kindness of the homeowners. The kids on family week really loved connecting with Catherine and Bobbie – and they built the stairs while they were at it! Thank you, Catherine and Bobbie, for the cookies, cakes, and camaraderie this summer.

Call for Silent Auction Items

We are seeking items for our annual virtual benefit silent auction. Items must be available, and it is great if they are donated by the producer or artist. Ideas include: Experiences, Artwork, Unique Items...Get creative and pitch us an idea for an auction item! Contact Anna (anna@bethlehemfarm.net) with questions or intended donations.



Special Thanks to Our Exceptional Donors!

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 Home Depot Foundation
 John & Lois Weber
 Chris & Tracy Whelan
 Charles & Kathy Sharp
 Carrie & Andrew Archual
 In Memory of Squiggles
 Pat Brady & Claire Faddis
 Lavoie/White Family

Become A Caretaker!

Can you see yourself living on the Farm year-round? We are seeking to welcome home Caretakers! A minimum of one-year commitment is required. More information can be found at www.bethlehemfarm.net/become-a-caretaker or contact Anna at hiring@bethlehemfarm.net

Worksite Re-cap

By Sarah, *Caretaker*

Here are a few highlights of the many projects we've completed this summer!

Sue – Volunteers from Walsh Jesuit, Badin, and Merion-Mercy Academy kicked off the summer high school group season building a ramp at Sue's house. Cristo Rey Chicago, St. Martin de Porres, and



Fr. Ryan completed the work and continued to grow in friendship with Sue. We enjoyed Sue's witty personality and constant smile.

Bambie – We celebrated the completion of our work at Bambie's house. We completed the siding, added support to an interior wall, and built safe porch exits from Bambie's home. Countless volunteers contributed to this work over the last year, and Bambie expressed gratitude for the improvements to her home.

Bobbie – At Bobbie and her daughter Catherine's house, groups from Loyola Blakefield and St. Joseph Parish replaced deteriorating soffit and fascia, and refurbished and reinstalled gutters this summer.

Our Family Week volunteers rebuilt their unsafe front porch steps and Summer Servants and Caretakers completed the work. We loved sharing great conversation and baked treats on Catherine and Bobbie's porch.

Pam and Mike's Family – This summer we worked alongside Pam and her family to demolish their old mobile home and replace it with a new trailer. Together, we worked to construct the porches and steps that came with their new trailer so that Pam and Mike's family would have safe access to their home.

Kathy and Jerry – Last winter, we replaced their unsafe wood stove with an efficient heat pump system. This summer we began work stabilizing their floor and insulating their home. We recently installed bamboo flooring and are continuing our work with enclosing their ceiling with drywall. Volunteers enjoyed good conversation with Kathy and Jerry and cold sodas. The family week participants especially enjoyed the cartoons at their house.

Stanley – It was a gift to experience Stanley's interactions as he worked alongside us this summer. He only had one safe exit to his home when we began, so we built a porch as a second exit and a space for him to enjoy. We were blessed by Stanley's big heart and steady presence.

Welcome home, Casey and Jenna!

We are thrilled to have two new Caretakers join us this fall.

Casey

One of my favorite middle school memories was writing a book called Farmer Marvin's Garden. Construction paper vegetables (smiling, of course) depicted a farm "filled with vegetables galore, who are always very caring and always sharing more." Little did I know that soon I'd find a community that embodies the wisdom of these happy veggies...practically in my backyard! Bethlehem Farm is only two hours away from where I grew up in Roanoke, VA, and part of the Appalachian Mountains – an exciting spatial relationship for someone who studied geography in college and continues to make place-based art. My creativity flourished when I first came to the farm as a Summer Servant in 2021. Whether preparing fresh asparagus for dinner, repurposing old windows from one of our homeowners, or planning prayers about the nativity story, I found ways to welcome the creative spirit in the context of the cornerstones. The daily rhythm of contemplation and action grounded me so much that I extended my stay multiple times before heading to Minnesota for the St. Joseph Worker Program. Now I've followed the star back to Bethlehem Farm, ready to welcome this next stage of the pilgrimage. I bring the Sisters of St. Joseph's charism of loving God and neighbor without distinction, a trusty sketchbook, snail mail supplies, and memories of compassionate vegetables.



Jenna

Hello! I'm from Lemont, a suburb outside of Chicago. While pursuing my BS in Biology at Loyola University Chicago, I discovered Bethlehem Farm on a spring break service trip in March 2018. Encountering the Farm had an impact on me that lasted well beyond the week. I was inspired to prioritize community, simplicity, service, and prayer as the foundation for the life I wanted to build. Learning about sustainable agriculture and mountaintop removal coal mining sparked a passion for learning environmental science, which I picked up as a minor after my first trip to the Farm. After graduation, I stayed on at Loyola to finish a Master's program in environmental science and sustainability. Over the course of two years, I researched the effects of microplastics on freshwater algae in a laboratory. This experience solidified my desire for my life's work to involve caring for the earth and those impacted by its destruction. In looking forward to my next step, I felt a strong pull to get my hands in some dirt and see what there was to learn outside the lab. I feel called to cultivate simplicity and a closeness to the earth, to join an intentional community, to serve the community I find myself in, and to grow closer to God. Name a better place than Bethlehem Farm for that!

Falling

By Casey, Caretaker

Autumn of this year marks the inauguration of the West Virginia Waterfall Trail. What can the hundreds of waterfalls in this mountainous landscape teach us about falling?

When swimming in the crisp, clear currents at Sandstone, a 1,500-foot wide drop on the New River, I think about this poem from Rilke's Book of Hours:

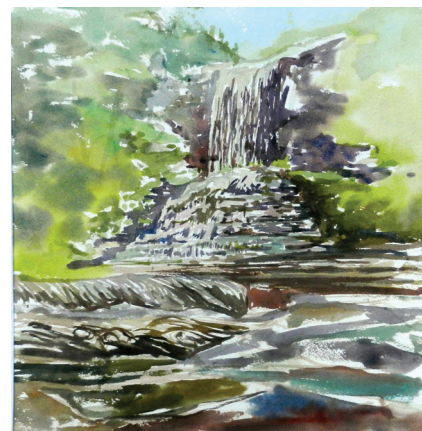
*"How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the smallest thing
and pulls it towards the heart of the world...
this is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness."*

Rilke reminds us falling is inevitable—throughout our lives, we will repeatedly make mistakes, experience failure, and live into imperfections—and yet, every one of those moments is an opportunity to fall deeper into loving union with God. In other words, falling can be a beautiful (though sometimes scary) transformation experience.

Even The Big Fall of Adam and Eve might be seen as a gift. As theologian John Aurelio points out, God saw that creation was good. Good is different from being the best or perfect or free from suffering. As the name of his book explains, there have always been *Mosquitos in Paradise*.

Adam and Eve have to go through the difficult journey of eating from the Tree of Knowledge to begin to see the world as God sees it. Falling is part of a journey to see with greater clarity the heaven that already exists here on earth.

As autumn settles in, let us trust the forces that pull us together towards the Source of Life, knowing we will be transformed. Let us learn from the water droplets courageously sailing down cliffs and then reuniting as one body running downstream. May we welcome the fall, trusting that God is with us through it all.



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.

OUR COMMUNITY:

- Sarah Brightfield
- Colleen Fitts
- Eric Fitts
- Anna Koshiol
- Jenna Molaro
- Casey Murano
- Steve Rassa
- Molly Sutter

BOARD MEMBERS:

- Josh Bleisch
- Brenna Davis
- Brent Fernandez
- John Hannagan
- Andrew Ketchum
- Lauren LaCoy
- Vickey McBride
- Kera McNelis
- Kathryn Moran
- Jennifer Scott
- Tim Shovlin
- Rachelle Simon
- Craig Snyder
- Richard Storey
- Nicholas Vergatos

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Thank you, Will!

By Colleen, Caretaker

This summer marked the end of four and half years of all-out effort and service by Will Fair, Project Director. Will joined us in 2018 as our first-ever locally based Project Director. We had gotten to know him through a carpentry course that he taught which our caretakers attended at the local community college. We



were thrilled to have him join us and take the helm of the low-income home repair program. Will is known for being very funny,

easygoing, and a good teacher. He has a big heart and really cared about our home repair clients, often going the extra mile to make sure they had what they needed. He has many skills in carpentry, electric, plumbing, and vehicle repair. As a veteran himself, he was uniquely able to reach out to local veterans and make sure they knew about our program. He drove a hard bargain at local lumber yards and got the best deals he could on home repair materials for our clients. Will also has the distinction of being one of the longest-tenured Project Directors/Project Coordinators at Bethlehem Farm or Nazareth Farm. It is a tough job to work with home repair clients on older houses with volunteers who are new to the work...but he did it with his whole heart! We thank him for his wit, his long hours, his patience, his delicious grill-outs, and all the homes that are safer, warmer, and drier thanks to his dedication.

Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities Program Gearing up to Meet Increasing Need

By Eric, Director

At its April meeting, the Board of Directors saw the need to conduct an operational review of our Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities local service program.

There are several aspects to this review:

- **Project Prioritization:** With 50 households on our waiting list, so many urgent projects, and fewer service providers in our area, we are refining our process for deciding the types of projects we accept and the order in which we take on projects, helping us to manage and reduce our current 2-year backlog.
- **Client Onboarding:** We are updating our low-income home repair application and contract, as well as our client screening procedures.
- **Leadership model:** We are determining the ideal leadership structure for the program.
- **Site Leader Training:** We are further developing home repair training materials, resources, and strategies for current Home Repair Site Leaders and onboarding of future Caretaker site leaders.
- **Funding Strategies:** We are considering which fundraising strategies are best-suited for the program, including which grants and programs enable the best use of staff time and resources.
- **Client Case Management and Referrals:** We receive many calls for projects that are either outside of our service area or outside of our capabilities and mission, so we are updating and expanding contacts for regional service providers in order to help people in need find help.



We are already seeing fruits from this concerted effort to update our protocols and focus our energies on those projects where we can make the highest impact with the skills we have. Please hold us in prayer during this time of discernment and reach out to us with any ideas of your own.

Check us out online!
www.bethlehemfarm.net

Questions or Comments regarding this publication, article submissions and photos can be sent to the editor at caretakers@bethlehemfarm.net