

## JOIN US FOR A GROUP WEEK!

Registration is open for  
Family Week (July 23 – 29)  
Adult Week (July 30 - Aug. 5)  
Masters Week: (Sept. 16-21)

Contact Steve at  
volunteer@bethlehemfarm.net  
304-445-7143  
or register through our website  
bethlehemfarm.net

## A LENTEN REFLECTION

By Jenna, Caretaker

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

*We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.*

I am fascinated by the idea that to carry life, we must also carry dying. It can be hard to embrace dying, our focus is more often on carrying life—making space for life to thrive. We try cultivating habits that stick to live healthier lifestyles mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The whole Lenten season leads up to life—it's what we're preparing for. But the season itself is about dying.

The natural world gives ample examples of how to carry about dying and why it's necessary. I picture myself working in the garden. Right now our beds are lush with cover

crops. Everyone is excited to plant peas, beets, carrots, etc. Plants will seed and root and grow and flower this season, which is such a wondrous sight to behold. But before we plant anything, we must clear the rye and vetch. These plants served their vital role this winter. They kept nutrients fixed in the soil, they helped maintain a balance within the ecosystem between soil bacteria, fungi, insects, worms, and plants. They kept weeds from taking over. That's what the land needed this last season, but now it is okay, and even good, for death to occur so that new life can grow in its place.

If we skipped over the death, kept the cover crops, and tried to nestle new vegetables amongst them, nothing would grow to its potential. Things would be too crowded, there wouldn't be enough nutrients for every plant, enough space to breathe and receive sunlight, roots would collide and entangle. The same is true in our lives. When we try to cultivate healthier lifestyles mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually we must prune away things that no longer serve us and make room for blossoming.

## FAJITA VEGGIES

A Taco Tuesday favorite from the Bethlehem Farm recipe binder. This recipe is flavorful, but not too spicy...unless you add some hot peppers!

- 9x13 pan full of chopped in-season veggies
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 tsp chili powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup olive oil
- 4 Tbsp lemon juice

Mix ingredients (except veggies) in a sauce pan.

Bring to a boil while stirring, then remove from heat.

Place in-season vegetables (we often use cauliflower, peppers, onions, zucchini) into a 9x13 baking dish and pour the sauce over them. Mix to evenly coat veggies.

Bake in 350-degree oven until vegetables are tender, approximately 45-60 minutes.

## APPLY TO BE A CARETAKER!

Bethlehem Farm is seeking full-time Caretakers to join our community!

From harvesting vegetables to repairing roofs to ministering to high school students, there are many ways to grow and serve here. Benefits include volunteer stipend, local and organic meals, use of vehicles, and the possibility of an AmeriCorps education award. Minimum one-year commitment.

Call Anna at 304-445-7143 or email [hiring@bethlehemfarm.net](mailto:hiring@bethlehemfarm.net) for more information. The Caretaker application can be found at: [bethlehemfarm.net/caretaker](http://bethlehemfarm.net/caretaker)

Bed Pillows  
Ear protection  
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Check out our online  
tool registry...  
[bethlehemfarm.net/  
tools](http://bethlehemfarm.net/tools)

WISH LIST



## WELCOME HOME TO THE BETHLEHEM FARM COMMUNITY!



## JACK

Hey there. The name's Jack, but I guess you already knew that. I'm joining the community as Facilities Guy, Retreats and Spirituality Coordinator, Bucket Wrangler,

and Assistant Knower of Things. I fell in love with the Farm and spent many years as a Summer Servant with the intention of one day fulfilling my dream of becoming a Caretaker. This would have gone off without a hitch, but as is something of an ongoing theme in my life, God had other plans. Thus, upon graduation from the Catholic University of America in 2019, I spent two years in formation with the Capuchin Franciscans of the Province of Saint Augustine, followed by a year teaching religion, finally reapplying to the Farm and making my triumphal return in 2023.

## MARCUS

Hello! I live in White Sulphur Springs, WV. I have a well-rounded background in the construction field with an emphasis on concrete and foundations. Most of my work history has been in commercial and industrial settings, so working at the Farm is a welcome change of pace. There is a deep sense of love and compassion at Bethlehem Farm that has drawn me here. I find comfort in knowing that my time here will draw me closer to God and make me a better servant. When I'm not working, I spend most of my time with my family or serving at my church. There is never a dull moment in my life and I try to fill most of it with laughter and the best dad jokes I can get my hands on.



## A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE

*By Anna, 2023 St. Anselm volunteer*

My week at Bethlehem Farm is set apart from everything else in my life. I was provided with the unique opportunity to disconnect from the outside world and wholeheartedly engage with the community directly in front of me. Upon arrival we were instantly greeted by hugs and people saying, "Welcome home!" Initially I thought to myself, "What have I gotten myself into?" After my week, however, I do consider Bethlehem Farm home, and I knew when I left that I would be back someday.

I got to experience each of the cornerstones - community, simplicity, service, and prayer - in an incredibly tangible way throughout the week. The Caretakers at the Farm graciously showed us their way of life and allowed us to show them a bit of ours. They quickly took to one of our catchphrases, and it became a theme of the week. There was an instant feeling of acceptance and belonging created by the environment on the Farm. Being surrounded by a community so rooted in God allowed me to comfortably explore my own faith. Everybody's faith is unique, and this was expressed in the prayers we created that ranged from music, to poetry, to the washing of the feet.



It was so easy to see God in a tangible way. Focusing on simplicity and the foundation of what makes us all similar was also a key focus of the week. We all, meaning the staff of the Farm as well as the group from my college, were SO different from each other; coming from different backgrounds, beliefs, ways of life, etc. However, unplugging, being one with nature, and serving our community put us all on the same level in a way that I had never felt before. We were all there for different reasons, but we all benefitted equally from our experiences.

The opportunity to serve the people of Appalachia was an incredible opportunity. It never felt like "the more fortunate helping the less fortunate." Rather, it felt like neighbors coming together in service for the greater good. It was a blessing to hear the stories of the people we encountered, and those experiences definitely impacted the way I view the world. I feel a deep sense of gratitude for this experience. The authentic relationships I formed on the basis of faith and the opportunity to live simply and serve those in the community will leave a lasting impact on me. Thank you, Bethlehem Farm!

## HOME REPAIR HIGHLIGHTS

By Sarah, Caretaker

**Charlie:** Volunteers from Immaculata and Benedictine College replaced Charlie's exterior front and back doors, repaired a rotting exterior wall, and demolished an unsafe awning and side porch. We were happy to work side-by-side with this client to utilize his expertise and ensure that he was satisfied with the work. Charlie's kindergarten-age daughter showed her appreciation for our work through her bike tricks and gift of a sock monkey.

**Gala:** Gala has been waiting to get her bedroom floor completed for three years so she was very excited when St. Ambrose volunteers installed the flooring this March. We used Wheaton Franciscan Sustainable Upgrade funds to purchase bamboo flooring and recycled denim underlayment for this project.

**"Susie" Ruth Ann:** When we visited this client for their floor repair request, we realized the cause of the rot was the septic system backflowing to underneath the house and the toilet was flushing directly onto the bathroom floor for five years. The family now has a working toilet and septic system. We are collaborating with another local home repair non-profit, Appalachian Folklife Center, who will be completing the long-term floor repairs.

**Nora:** During March group weeks, Bethlehem Farm collaborated with Wellspring, another local nonprofit, to build a porch and wheelchair ramp at Nora's house. We loved working alongside Nora's son to build the ramp and porch and look forward to continuing to partner with Wellspring in the future.

**Tammy:** March groups built a ramp, installed flooring, and replaced two windows at Tammy's house. We enjoyed vacuuming with Tammy's toddler grandson to prepare the floor for the new flooring, and appreciated great conversations.



**Frank & Jamie:** We continued working with Frank and Jamie by hiring a contractor to jack up their two-story porches and rebuild the first story of the porches. Frank and Jamie are very happy with their new porches.

**Mary & David:** We were able to give Mary and David five efficient electric baseboard heaters and provide an emergency roof leak repair to slow the damage until it can be replaced.



## HOPE AND PATIENCE IN THE GARDEN

By Molly, Caretaker

Over the course of our three March group weeks, we prepared the way for the onions. Folks spent hours removing weeds from the beds, feeding the soil with compost and ash from our fireplace, and clearing pathways for water drainage, all to ready our designated spot of Earth for one of the first crops we plant in springtime.

Volunteers on the third week were able to plant over 1,000 red, yellow, and white onions because folks before them were willing to put their hands in the soil. We will harvest these in the summer and many will taste the fruits of our collaboration with the soil throughout the coming year. We are people of hope, planting seeds that will one day grow, serving those members of the beloved community we do not yet know. I cannot imagine any lasting patience that is not grounded in hope, especially since we do not know the future.

Often we are asked to plant seeds we will not see to fruition. I am not the Master Gardener, I cannot see the full picture. But as I enter my fourth growing season working with the soil of Bethlehem Farm, I understand there are places we are all called to ongoing stewardship, co-creation with God, seeing things through.

As I prepare potato beds for planting with our April volunteers and my body wakes up from a long winter's rest, I lean into patience. Practicing patience in the necessary waiting time between planting and sprouting allows my hope to grow, swelling until bursting into a blossom of its own. Hallelujah!

**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
- Jack Lampton
- Marcus Lyons
- 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 Showlin
- Rachelle Simon
- Craig Snyder
- Richard Storey
- Nicholas Vergatos

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**DIRECTOR'S CORNER**

*By Eric, Director*

As we approach 20 years of transforming lives through service with the local community and teaching sustainable practices, it has been awe-inspiring to see our community grow and our mission and programs develop over time. Each Caretaker leaves their mark on this community, broadening our sense of the Body of Christ, refining organizational systems, and enhancing our mission and ministry. Having welcomed our 48th Caretaker to the Farm this spring, we are rich indeed in the experience and wisdom shared by so many people over time.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen the establishment of our nationally-known Rebuild My Church service-retreat program, our Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities local service program, the Tomorrow's Sustainable Leaders program of teaching sustainable practices and caring for our common home, which has also been further developed in partnership with the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters to include our Sustainable Upgrade, Weatherization, and Solar Upgrade programs, collectively called the Green Neighbors program.

Each new or improved offering is a gift and each also involves new levels of complexity and increased effort to master and pass on the systems needed for success. Anyone involved in ministry knows that there is no shortage of good work to be done and burnout lurks right around the corner if we are not keeping sustainability in mind. Within the above context, the Board wisely began an operational review of the Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities program to assess outcomes, streamline systems, and strengthen the program, keeping a keen eye on enhancing Caretaker vitality and preventing burnout.

In the fall newsletter, I introduced the main topics of the review; here I will share our progress to date. With 40 households on our waiting list, we have instituted project prioritization guidelines, factoring in urgency, volunteer-friendliness, date of application, travel time, and budget. We reviewed our client onboarding, including revamping our website landing page for clients, home repair application, and homeowner contract, with legal review. We overhauled our leadership model, forming the Projects Team to run the Repairing Homes, Renewing Communities program, with two new positions: Project Manager and Construction Manager. We beefed up our home repair site leader training using resources from fellow members of the Coalition for Home Repair and online video resources. We determined which funding strategies are best-suited for the program, including which grants and programs enable the best use of staff time and resources. Finally, we refined our Client Case Management and Referrals, updating and expanding contacts for regional service providers in order to help people in need find help, since we receive many calls for projects that are either outside of our service area or outside of our capabilities and mission.

Kudos to the Board Members and Caretakers who took the extra time and effort on late evening phone calls to work on this operational review and improve this vital program!



**TOOL TUESDAY THANK YOU!**

A special THANK YOU to all who donated to our Tool Tuesday fundraiser. Because of YOU we were able to outfit our summer work sites so they are ready for success! Our home repair program couldn't be run without generous donors like you!