

Field for Treasure

Volume 18, Issue 2
Fall 2023

THE BETHLEHEM FARM NEWSLETTER

Mark Your Calendar!
December 9
at 6 PM EST

Our Annual Benefit

RSVP online at
[bethlehemfarm.net/
winterbenefit](http://bethlehemfarm.net/winterbenefit)

I've Always Been A Caretaker

by Jack, Caretaker

These last few months I had the pleasure of working with a homeowner named Deloris. Her projects included building a wheelchair ramp for her husband, replacing several windows, and extending a roof overhang that wasn't keeping the elements out. I often find myself using the term "working with" to describe what we're doing at a client's home due to the mutual give and take which often accompanies the work we do, but never has this been so apt a term as at Deloris'

house. Deloris is a passionate Christian, singer, and cook, and if you spend any time at all around her, all three quickly become evident.

One day while the crew and I were working, we began to smell homemade fried chicken. The Farm worksite lunch of hummus, trail mix, peanut butter, and homemade bread is more than adequate, but there are few things in this world which will make you realize how good God is like homemade fried chicken. It turns out her grandchildren were coming over that day and she loves cooking for them. I knew everyone in our crew was thinking about how much they'd love to be Deloris' grandchildren right about then. Lunch time rolled around, and to our amazement, there came Deloris, bearing hot fried chicken and homemade biscuits!

Naturally, we fell upon these culinary delights like locusts, and honestly, I don't know if it made us happier to eat them or Deloris happier that she was able to bring people such pleasure with her cooking. From then on, Deloris wouldn't hear of us eating our simple cooler lunch at her house. She made us chili, beans, garden fresh vegetables, homemade cornbread fried just right, catfish – you name it, Deloris could cook it. Each day, when we thanked her for the meal, she'd tell us, "I just love serving those who serve others."

Her response, so clearly true in the loving way she invited each of us into her home, made me thankful that I got to serve someone so dedicated to serving others. This is precisely God's kingdom



made manifest – people trying to do good and be strength for one another. Deloris has spent her whole life as a caretaker, tirelessly serving family, friends, and those around her, and I relished letting her be the one taken care of for a change. Though, when I think back to those days sitting in a half drywalled sunroom, eating fried chicken and talking about the power in the name of Jesus, I find myself wondering who was really taking care of whom.

Canning Lids

Utility Knives

Luci CORE
Solar Lanterns

Glass Oven-safe
9x13 Pans w/ Lids

Used Bath
Towels

Postage
Stamps

Check out our
online tool
registry...

[bethlehemfarm.net/
wish-list](http://bethlehemfarm.net/wish-list)

WISH LIST



Silent Auction Items

We are seeking items for our annual benefit silent auction. This year we will have both an online-only and a live in-person auction. See enclosed invite for more details!

Auction item ideas include:
experiences, artwork, handcrafted items, ever popular vacation homes...

Get creative and pitch us an idea for an auction item!

Contact Jenna at 304-445-7143 or Jenna@bethlehemfarm.net with questions or intended donations

Special Thanks to Our Exceptional Donors!

Wellspring of the Greenbrier, Inc.
 Ray & Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust
 Mary Beth Berkley & David Salinas
 Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church
 In memory of Richard D. Gamache
 Blanche M. Walsh Charity Trust
 Catherine Leser & John Manning
 Andi Grandy & Andy Rebollar
 In memory of Gary Karasinski
 Volunteer West Virginia Inc.
 Dominican Sisters of Peace
 In Memory of Sylvia Hoefer
 In memory of Lin Greidanus
 Joe Hofmann & Anne Barnes
 Puddleglum the Marshwiggles
 In Memory of Bill & Betty Mann
 Bernard McDonough Foundation
 Jennie & Mike Motto Mesterharm
 United Way of the Greenbrier Valley
 In Memory of John & Michael Wright
 The Hollowell Dawkins Foundation, Inc.
 Disabled Veterans National Foundation
 Dr. Peter and Mrs. Elise Schafer and family
 Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent

Wheaton Franciscan Sisters
 Julie Engel and Dan Lorenz
 Oscar & Patrice Valenzuela
 Adam & Kendra Goudreau
 Housing Assistance Council
 Jacelyn & Christy Hammill
 Bill Wolf & Bonnie Brooks
 Craig Snyder & Jen Scott
 Rachele & Arielle Simon
 Zach & Carley Haselhorst
 Carrie & Andrew Archual
 Helen Brach Foundation
 Marilyn and Paul Knapp
 Nancy & Michael Sutter
 Rachel & Michael Kraus
 Charles & Kathy Sharp
 Jake & Alicen Teitgen
 Bob & Pauline Hanich

Kera & Scott McNelis
 Megan & Jordan Skarr
 Koch Foundation Inc.
 Rosie Vander Kelen
 Abe & Grace Mathews
 Bob & Deborah Neary
 Danny & Beth Patton
 David & Aimee Tracy
 Kara & Alex Timmons
 Scott & JoAnn Haner
 The Artmayer Family
 Bob & Pat Rebollar
 Peter & Mary Denio
 Tom & Pat Ruggaber
 Mary & Mike Grady
 Nancy & Tom Dufek
 Sharyl & Joe Rust
 Christina Mayhew

Claire Sofronas
 Daniel Brennan
 Erdman Family
 Gemma Stanton
 Jeffrey Simms
 John Hannagan
 Kathleen Puhl
 Kathryn Moran
 Diane Murray
 Lynne Pettey
 Benote Wimp
 Marc Slain
 Paul Fagan
 Anonymous
 Kim Klamm
 Tim Buck
 Tom Buck

Become A Caretaker!

Can you see yourself living on the Farm year-round? We are looking to welcome home Caretakers! We are especially seeking someone excited about the house manager role. A minimum one-year commitment is required. More information can be found at www.bethlehemfarm.net/caretaker or contact Casey at [hiring@bethlehemfarm.net](mailto: hiring@bethlehemfarm.net)

Worksite Wrap-up

By Anna, Caretaker

Bethlehem Farm has wrapped up another great summer season of group weeks! To-date in 2023 we have completed 197 home repair projects, serving 29 households, and are looking to complete even more before the end of the year! The summer was full of welcoming home nearly 300 week-long volunteers and building relationships with the 65 individuals whose homes we made healthier, safer, warmer, and drier.

One homeowner, Bonnie, is an in-home caretaker for older adults who works long hours. When she's not taking care of her patients, she's taking care of her neighbors, family, and volunteers who walk through her door. We enjoyed sharing her homemade breakfasts and desserts, listening to her wonderful laughter in relating her day, and receiving her many thanks and life advice. It's been a pleasure to work with Bonnie and all of our clients this summer!



Wildfires, Haze, and a Girl Forgotten

By Clara, Summer Servant 2023

This summer, throughout the world and even in our haven tucked away in Appalachia, wildfire smoke from Canada obscured the sky. The evening mountains, the brilliant sunrise, and the starry night were hardly visible through the haze, but on the night of the campfire on my final group week, the haze lifted and I looked up and beheld the true majesty of the stars.

The Farm has a way of removing life's haze. As a Summer Servant, I experienced my haze melt, and, stripped of my narratives, my individualism, and every competency I have ever cultivated, people beheld the truth. When I first arrived, the classic chorus of "Welcome home!" greeted me. While there, I also welcomed home myself. I re-met a girl who had been obscured by the haze for a long time. In the sky, I reencountered the girl so obsessed with the stars that she made models and paintings of the solar system for fun. Sitting in the dirt that clung to every inch of my body leading garlic harvesting, I recalled the kid who loved the dirt so much that she won awards at camp for camouflaging herself in mud and leaves. In all the music, I found that silly gal who danced with her sister because she loved it and not because she had ANY talent. I met the girl whose prayer was play—the girl who loved God fiercely and authentically, the way we strive to love God.

Just as the depth of the sky and the vastness of the stars became clear one night, while at the Farm the haze around my vision lifted and my gaze broadened. The intentional living of the cornerstones – prayer, simplicity, service, and community – invites true presence in every moment. In forging bonds of with the other Summer Servants, Caretakers, and volunteers, listening to the stories of Donna whose home I helped repair, and finding fullness in play, in garlic, in chickens, in music, in community night... I felt the present with the same overflow of joy and passion and melancholy of recalling a fond and safe memory—like a living nostalgia.

The wildfires we experienced this summer are a result of the changing climate and environmental degradation caused by mindless consumerism and a culture that does not regard the dignity of humans, creatures made in the image and likeness of God, aside from their "productivity" – a narrative that we at the Farm resist. This culture also causes the life haze which separates us from ourselves, but the Farm and the girl waiting within me brought me home. And I will take her home, too.

Celebrating the Greenbrier River Watershed

By Casey, Caretaker

A stealthy blanket of clouds glides over the bridge downstream...a low grumble sounds. The kids in the river don't notice; they are focused on splashing one another, skipping rocks, and scooping up fistfuls of mud. Unfortunately, the red lifeguard tube on my lap means I'm responsible for ushering the young family week volunteers out of the water with a shrill whistle. We quickly get ourselves into the trucks, even though the kids are disappointed by the early ending to Swimming Day. Suddenly, a strong wind bursts through and a tree branch plummets into the Greenbrier River. Another tree crashes down on the Bethlehem Farm driveway, as we soon find out.

To greet us back at the Farm is also news of a power outage. The backup solar battery fails. Fortunately, we still have the generator to turn on during strategic intervals throughout the day to keep food from spoiling in the refrigerator. There's an electricity fast every night this week, not just Thursday.

These few days without easy access to lights and stovetop burners have me reflecting on my energy usage. Even as we commit to conserving materials and living simply at the Farm,

we still use electricity – to charge our batteries, cook scrambled eggs, heat water, etc. It's easy to take for granted our access to this resource and forget that such systems, no matter how sophisticated they seem, are not foolproof.

So, it worries me to see construction picking up on the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Can I trust a 42-inch-wide pipe to trek up and down mountains across the expanse of West Virginia and not leak at all, ever? The MVP is a dangerous project in the short and long term: I saw an excavator almost flip over on Clayton Road, and there's a high toll of greenhouse gases that would come from this pipeline each year: the equivalent of 19 million cars, according to Oil Change International.

With the pipeline construction, there is much to be nervous about, but we are doing our best to transform these fears and frustrations into collective action. ...Continued on pg.4



Serve With Us as a Summer Servant!

Join us during March-October 2024 for a few weeks or a few months in living out the Gospel cornerstones. Applications are NOW available!

More information can be found at www.bethlehemfarm.net/become-a-summer-servant or contact Casey at hirings@bethlehemfarm.net

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:

- Colleen Fitts
- Eric Fitts
- Anna Koshiol
- Jack Lampton
- Marcus Lyons
- Jenna Molaro
- Casey Murano
- Steve Rassa
- Angela Solazzo
- Molly Sutter

BOARD MEMBERS:

- Arielle Chard
- Brenna Davis
- Brent Fernandez
- Andrew Ketchum
- Lauren LaCoy
- Caitlin Mattera
- Mary Catherine McDonald
- Kathryn Moran
- Steve Morrill
- Jennifer Scott
- Tim Showlin
- Rachelle Simon
- Craig Snyder
- Richard Storey
- Nick Vergatos

Printed on recycled paper



By our friends at Panther Graphics
a minority-owned business

Continued from page 3...“The Telling Takes Us Home” (one of the people’s pastoral letters written by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia) urges us to become activists by “putting into practice one’s faith in God’s coming community of creation.” In August, Bethlehem Farm participated in this kind of prayerful activism through the Greenbrier River Celebration and Interfaith Vigil.

After the vigil, we continued building community at the Historic Graham House in Talcott, West Virginia. The Caretakers who went concluded the day with a relaxing swim in the Greenbrier. Floating in the clear water reminded us what a gift this flowing body is.

I may have trouble trusting the pipeline, but one thing I do believe in is a network of passionate folks rooted in prayer and care for the river. I know such a vibrant community will not be destroyed by a power outage, extinguished by malfunctioning infrastructure, or stopped by a thunderstorm. If anything, we will keep on swimming.

For the full article and resources of how you can help care for the Greenbrier River, visit the Bethlehem Farm blog at www.bethlehemfarm.net/blog

**Director’s Corner
It’s Dream Time**

By Eric, Director

*“Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.”
– Gloria Steinem*

As each group begins their week at Bethlehem Farm, we share with them our origin story, which emphasizes the power of dreams. We recall how dreams, both literal and figurative, have played such an important role in salvation history and we share the “dreams turned reality” that litter the Bethlehem Farm landscape:

- *the gift of the original property
- *the success of the first appeal for support
- *the first Caretakers, Julie and Russ, to answer the call
- *the first groups to join us
- *the beginnings of the home repair program
- *the first harvest
- *the first child in our midst
- *incorporating as a nonprofit
- *growing to a full community of 9 Caretakers
- *our first string of solar panels
- *the birth of the composting toilet system
- *installing the high tunnel greenhouse
- *building the Caretaker Residence
- *hiring our first salaried employee to run the home repair program
- *birth of the Green Neighbors solar install program
- *erecting the San Damiano Center for Sustainability and the Danny Keith Maintenance Garage
- *our conversion to solar hot water
- *installing the battery back-up
- *the purchase of the adjoining parcel of the Mann Farm ...



These dreams did not birth themselves—they were born of a careful process of planning. First, a small, committed group that formed the Advisory Board. Next, the early days of getting our feet under us. Then, engagement with Chameleon Architecture to shape our Master Plan in 2011, which was renewed again in 2015. These plans stood the test of time and helped us weather a global pandemic.

The Board of Directors has decided it is time again to dream, to renew our Master Plan, and set our sights on the next harvest. What will be set aside? What will be strengthened? What new endeavors will be added to the list above? And what will your part be in the dream? Feel free to send me any thoughts on the above (eric.fitts@bethlehemfarm.net).

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