

Field for Treasure

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

SUMMER 2006

In the beginning...

By Tom Ruggaber

Little did I know what would evolve at the college week at Nazareth Farm in January of 2004. Of course I was excited as I always am arriving on Sunday night with my group. The weather was very cold (you haven't experienced a bucket shower until you have taken one in 15 degree temperature) and icy. Several of the Farm vehicles were in need of repair; one was nearly in a very serious accident from a defective wheel. Worst of all the Farm's best friend, Ralph Sandora, died that Monday. Without Ralph's help, Nazareth Farm would not have survived twenty-five years ago.

While we mourned Ralph, the Spirit was alive in us, starting a new birth. The college teens who were there that week saw a vision of a "second Nazareth Farm". Discussions centered on the need for another Farm, what would it take to create one (finding a place, raising funds, etc.), who would be willing to work on its creation and finally how do we find the right people who would be willing to

dedicate several years of their lives to staff it. By the end of the week a group had volunteered to take this project on and had given it the name of Bethlehem Farm. At the end of that week, despite my enthusiasm and that of those all around me, I thought that even with wonderful intentions our chance of success was small. I have been on groups like this before. Before I could really grasp it, our little group grew to over 40 supporters and one of the teens from that conception week was making contacts with possible partners in Appalachia with whom we could establish Bethlehem Farm. As a result of this initial investigation, the "search team" became more focused and developed a vision and a time line for the creation of Bethlehem Farm.

Our concept of when we would have the funds and property to start was aggressively slated for the Summer of 2007. Also, after much prayer and discern-

ment, a couple arose to volunteer to take on the long term staffing once Bethlehem Farm was established. Now all we needed were several hundreds of thousands of dollars, a place for our ministry, and the capability of providing shelter and support for the future staffers and volunteers.

After investigating several locations, at the end of January we heard of a former Catholic Worker Farm that was looking for the appropriate organization to continue a Catholic presence in and around Summers County, West Virginia. The Spirit must have been working overtime since this was the ideal place. Forty-seven acres of beautiful pasture and forest atop the Appalachia Mountains, with facilities to serve up to 35 staff and volunteers and it would come with all the furnishings. There was already a strong Ecumenical presence that we could use to introduce

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Loyola University plays Alderson Prison All-Stars in Softball

By Heather Angell

In Alderson, WV, the women's federal prison camp is a fixture. One of the largest employers in town, its sprawling campus looks more like a college than the stereotypical wire and bars that might pop into a person's head when one thinks of prison.

It was a beautiful Spring afternoon when the Loyola University Chicago volunteers pulled into the visitor's parking lot at the Alderson Federal Prison Camp. With



Loyola University Volunteers after a softball game with the Alderson Inmates.

two gloves between the 10 of us we strode confidently into the waiting room, ready for a light-hearted game of softball with the team at the Camp. "We might not even keep score," some thought, while others pondered the numbers in attendance. After meeting some of the prison staff we realized what we were stumbling into wasn't going to be a simple game of catch. As we headed out to the field, the numbers started to unfold. We had pictured about

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BETHLEHEM FARM WISH LIST:

- Prayers
- Funds for road repair
- Wood-burning boiler
- Solar panels
- Hedge shears
- Weedwacker, cord style
- Hydraulic Jack and four (4) jack stands
- 14" Bandsaw
- Stamps
- Dust buster vacuums
- Pillows
- Mattresses
- Splitting Mauls
- Post-hole diggers
- More Prayers

Our Advisory Board Members

Meet **Tom Ruggaber**, Chairman of the Bethlehem Farm Advisory Board. Tom, affectionately called “Rugs,” is also a member of the Nazareth Farm Board of Directors. Known for his ground-level management, Rugs retired from Lucent after 31 years and devotes his energy to his family, his parish of St. Michael in Wheaton, IL, and to the growth and development of Bethlehem and Nazareth Farms.

Eric Fitts is the BF Advisory Board Co-Chairman, currently a graduate student at the University of West Virginia in Morgantown. Eric plans to bring his education in Non-Profit Management to Bethlehem Farm in 2007, when he and his wife, Colleen, intend to join the BF community. Eric served as Volunteer Staff and Project Coordinator at Nazareth Farm from 1999-2002 and is dedicated to creating a sustainable community at BF.

Colleen Fitts is the BF Advisory Board Treasurer and also a student at WVU in Morgantown, focusing on a graduate degree in Social Work. She served as Volunteer Staff and Project Coordinator at Nazareth Farm from 2003-05. Colleen and Eric have already served at Bethlehem Farm on several group weeks, and Colleen has helped lead a number of Board projects, including the submission of grants for Farm improvements.

The BF Advisory Board Secretary is **Julie Tracy**. She served at Nazareth Farm as Volunteer Staff and Interim Director from 2003-05, and at Bethlehem Farm as one of the first two Caretakers. She currently serves as a Chaplain at the University of New Hampshire and offers her many talents for the good of the Farm.

Liz Drapa currently works for the Corporation for Supportive Housing, whose mission is to provide permanent housing throughout the state of Illinois for the homeless. Liz has worked in the field of affordable housing for the past nine years and offers her very valuable skills in grant writing and non-profit operation to our board.

Fr. Arthur Bufogle is a new member of the BF Advisory Board. He is the pastor of three parishes between Summers and Greenbrier Counties, including St. Patrick Church in Hinton and St. Mary of the Greenbrier in Alderson, the two churches frequented by the BF community. His upbringing in Japan, experience as a Trappist monk and teaching brother, and education in Soil Science give Fr. Arthur a unique perspective in supporting and guiding BF.

The newest member of the Advisory Board is **Jana Strom**. Jana served at Nazareth Farm from 2001-03 as Administrative Assistant and Volunteer Staff. She currently coordinates the Semester of Service program at the University of Dayton and has offered her assistance at Bethlehem Farm in any way that is needed.

What’s the Farm like when there’s no volunteer group?

By Ed Pluchar

I am privileged to be one of just a handful of people who can answer that question. And you, apparently, are not one of them. I mean, you are asking, right? Here’s one answer: What’s your life like when you don’t have any friends over? What’s life like when it’s just you and your family? That should explain the change in ambience from group weeks to non-group weeks. But if it doesn’t: Group weeks are louder, warmer (think body heat), more diverse in taste and background, and generally more exciting for these and other reasons. The more evasive question is, “What do we DO when groups aren’t here?” Do we ride Firecracker, even though we told you not to? I’ll tell you what we don’t do: We don’t cook for 30 people. Ok, I will stop evading the evasive question, and give you this **brief outline** of an average, atypical day at the Farm. ●————→

The Average, Atypical Day at Bethlehem Farm

6:00a – The sun rises. Russ hears the sun rise and wakes.
 6:01a – Ed wakes.
 6:23a – Ed and Russ split wood.
 7:14a – Heather wakes.
 7:45a – Heather does gardeny things.
 8:27a – Ed wakes Chris.
 8:30a – Morning prayer.

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A Word from a Distant Relative

By Kate York, Loyola University Chicago

I would like to thank everyone at Bethlehem Farm for the amazing experience I had this summer. Although I have participated in various mission trips over the years, I have always had a hard time keeping the experience with me. However, Bethlehem Farm and the brilliant people there changed my life. I see each new day differently as I now see God everywhere. I also feel more in touch with the beauty of nature and my prayer life is much stronger. My trip to Bethlehem Farm helped me find an inner peace that I lost this last year in the hustle and bustle of city life, and I can’t thank my group or the staff of Bethlehem Farm enough.

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ourselves into the community. It took several months to convince the Diocese of Wheeling/Charleston that we were real. The facility was signed over to the diocese for our use on December 8, 2004, less than one year from its conception. What we mortals envisioned to be a three year process, the Spirit provided in less than one year. Not only that, but we seemed to have donors to fund it and volunteers to staff it almost without effort. We had our first group weeks in March of 2005 and they are scheduled to continue.

I think that Ralph is as proud of Bethlehem Farm as I am. I’m sure that he had as much to do with starting Bethlehem Farm as he did with Nazareth Farm, but in a more spiritual way.

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a dozen spectators. We heard the loud din of a crowd and upon closer inspection, saw the hillsides filled, the bleachers at capacity. We had also been informed that this was, in all truth, the all-star team. These Alderson women sported uniforms and good arms. Somewhat hesitantly we strode to our visitor’s bench, wondering what would happen next. All kinds of stereotypes are attached to who a ‘prisoner’ is. And all of them melted away as the game began. The prison team was good. Really good. The Loyola Team, plus me, a Farm Caretaker,

were, well, bad. Really bad. We let fly balls drop, missed grounders, struck out, pretty much anything that can go wrong in a softball game went wrong for us. That first night we lost 28-10 and that’s only because the Alderson team gave us some sympathy runs. Two nights later we came back and this time we gave them a better game. With Ed and Chris’ power hitting, Marcy’s stellar pitching and Russ’ courageous catching performance, we even pulled ahead for one brief moment in time, before being crushed again. One woman remarked that, “she never thought she’d be so proud to be an

inmate”. As we returned borrowed gloves, the Alderson team gave us a ball with all their names signed on it. The crowd dispersed, but up on the hill, one of our Loyolans thought she spotted someone. She began to yell “Gail”. Sure enough, SOA prisoner of conscience Gail Phares was on the hill and came down to talk to us for awhile. Many of the Loyolans (and Farm Caretakers Russ and Heather) had traveled to the SOA vigil before. It was a touching moment and struck everyone deeply. Afterwards we celebrated at the Big Wheel Restaurant. We only wished our opposing team could have joined us to celebrate what we hope is the beginning of a growing friendship.

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9:00a – Ed and Chris leave for SARA (Southeastern Appalachia Rural Alliance, a local affordable housing agency).
9a-7p – Russ does officey things, installs a sink in the kitchen, and splits wood he told Ed he would not split. Heather wills carrots and onions to grow while planting squash, daydreams about dogs she’d like to adopt for the Farm, calls her mother and leaves notes ordering the raccoons to stay out of the compost bin. Chris works on brochures for SARA, writes e-mails to his mother, and sneaks out of the office to help at the work-site. Ed works on drafting a business plan for a home repair program, then leaves to assist the Construction Supervisor, Luke, at the work-site, where low-income families build their own homes together. Ed senses that Russ is chopping the wood reserved for Ed.
8:00p – Ed and Chris arrive home. 50% of the time, everyone eats dinner together. 50% of the time, Russ and Heather ate earlier, so Ed and Chris scrounge for hodge-podge dinner. Everyone shares stories from the day over dinner and dishes.
9:00p – Conversation continues or everyone heads downstairs to enjoy an episode of The West Wing on DVD.
10:00p – Some head to bed, others make phone calls, write letters, listen to records, or ride Firecracker under the full moon.
11:00p – Lights out!

Bethlehem Farm T-Shirts for Sale!

Bethlehem Farm, in keeping with our mission of sustainability, is selling Union-made, Sweat-free shirts for sale. They bear our “Manger” logo. They come in sizes Small to X-Large. There are three colors to choose from.

Hey, easy now. I know they’re worth everything in your savings account, but we’re only charging \$15, which includes shipping and handling! Simply fill in the form below and send your order to: Bethlehem Farm, P.O. Box 274, Pence Springs, WV 24962. Checks or money orders only. If you would like to order more than one shirt, give us a call or write a note detailing your order.

Please package me a shirt with the following distinguishing characteristics:

- Blue Gray Green
- Small Medium Large X-Large

Here are my e-mail address and phone number, in case Bethlehem Farm needs to contact me about my order:

Then send it to:

Name: _____

(Street Address or P.O. Box)

(City, State, and Zip Code)

(E-mail address)

(_____) _____

(Phone number)

Bethlehem Farm

P.O. Box 274
Pence Springs, WV 24962

Phone and Fax: 304-445-7143
E-mail: Bethlehemfarm@gmail.com

We're on the Web!
Bethlehemfarm.net

(Be warned, our site is still under construction).

At Bethlehem Farm

The hills hold safe in their cupped hands
This jewel of great worth.
A high and lonely place it seems,
Yet a source of peace on earth.

Our humble chores of home and farm
And, neighborly, lending a hand
To others in need, plants in us a seed
Of community, the way God planned.

The stars blaze brightly here tonight
And fireflies blink their reply,
As we share laughter and secret dreams
Till the time for sleep arrives.

Too soon our busy lives intrude,
And call us on our way.
But a sense of simplicity will remain
To guide us through our days.

And still our hearts and thoughts will turn
To the farm, that holy place,
Where we worked, and prayed, and
laughed, and sang,
And caught glimpses of God's face.

-Jen Midkiff, Brebeuf Jesuit Chaperone 6/06

OUR MISSION

Bethlehem Farm is a **Catholic** community dedicated to living out the **Gospel** and **Social Teachings** of the Church.

We base our lives on the cornerstones of **prayer, community, service** and **simplicity** and adopt **sustainable practices** in response to the Appalachian pastoral "**At Home in the Web of Life**".

We provide volunteers a **communal experience of Church**, while working to promote **social justice** through the **empowerment** of the local community.

We are a **center of reflection and prayer** in the service of action, inspired by the **Eucharist** and open to the **Spirit**.

It's Dream Time!

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 the lives of the teens and young adults 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 will be performing a community needs assessment to help determine how we can best serve the community, whether through home repair, community gardening, intensive tutoring, etc. For now, we are providing volunteers for local charities and community development groups. 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 enabling 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, and use rainwater to flush our toilets, but we hope to heat the house with a clean-burning wood boiler, run our vehicles on waste vegetable oil, and replace our coal-fired electricity with solar or wind power. By exploring alternative visions of a sustainable future, we seek to apply the Gospel to our present situation.