

# West Tennessee Pollinator Project

Cultivating a Love for Creation and Transforming Outreach through the  
Development of Church Apiaries



MEMPHIS CENTER FOR  
**FOOD AND FAITH**



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## ***Executive Summary***

The goal of the West Tennessee Pollinator Project is twofold:

- 1) To help Episcopal congregations to cultivate a growing understanding of the theology of stewardship of creation by creating resources around beekeeping and the role of pollination in local food systems.
- 2) To transform the way churches think about outreach.

This will primarily be achieved by installing beehives and colonies on land maintained by Episcopal churches. The Memphis Center for Food and Faith will provide educational resources and workshops on pollination and food systems. Thistle & Bee Enterprises will provide workshops on beekeeping. Churches will be able to engage with the beekeeping process at any level of involvement from sponsorship to full on maintenance as Thistle & Bee will provide maintenance, care, and mentorship for the hives in exchange for the ability to harvest honey. The proceeds of the honey sold from church apiaries will provide employment for Thistle & Bee employees who are survivors of the trafficking industry and help engage churches in meaningful economic development ministry and outreach. The startup costs would be matched by the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee and Memphis Center for Food and Faith.

**A Church makes a \$200 investment for a bee hive on their property. Funds are matched and gardens are improved, all while generating \$1200 of yearly revenue funding salaries for survivors of human trafficking. The WTN Pollinator Project aims to transform how we think about outreach.**

## ***Church Concept***

In the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee, there are thirty-one congregations, four Episcopal Schools, and a few other isolated properties. Stewardship of the property should not include the physical assets alone, but the land and the land's relationship and connection to its surrounding area. By placing apiaries on and around appropriate church properties, the health and vitality of neighborhood gardens will be improved, there will be increased opportunities for education on food systems, and churches will take an active role in caring for the communities where they are located. As bees routinely pollinate in a three-mile radius covering an area nearly thirty square miles, by adding beehives, the church instantly become more connected to the communities where they are located. Additionally, the churches will build a partnership with an organization and help develop a ministry that moves beyond charity by creating a renewable revenue stream for this organization.

By caring for bees on church grounds, churches further develop an understanding of stewardship that includes a much larger view of land, food, and resources. By alleviating churches of the responsibility of having to tend or care for the bees, this reduces the volunteer burnout of congregants while giving a church a radical idea of outreach that can be shared with the community.

## ***Thistle & Bee Enterprises***

Thistle & Bee Enterprises is a Memphis nonprofit and social enterprise that serves victims of human trafficking in Shelby county and beyond. The organization employs survivors who are working to develop a social enterprise that currently sells honey and granola in several locations in Shelby county. The honey is procured from a number of hives located in a few different locations in West Tennessee. Currently, the main apiaries are located at St. Columba Retreat and Conference Center and St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Millington. Thistle & Bee is a part of national network of nonprofits and agencies modeled after Thistle Farms in Nashville.

## ***West Tennessee Pollinator Project Design***

The following path is how we anticipate the project being launched on an annual basis:

December - February

- Churches signup for program. Make an investment of \$200 per hive with a minimum of two hives in Shelby County and five hives outside Shelby County (can be in a cohort with a neighboring congregation).

March

- Memphis Center for Food Faith offers church workshop on stewardship of creation.
- Thistle & Bee makes site visit to identify suitable locations and placements of hives. Thistle & Bee will offer basic beekeeping class and mentoring process to any church members interested in taking a more vested interest in the process.

March - May

- Thistle & Bee sources all equipment, bees, and then introduces the bees to the hives.

August-October

- Diocese of West Tennessee, St. Columba, and Thistle & Bee host periodic harvest Eucharist when honey is harvested, inviting the congregation to participate in a celebration Eucharist.

November-December

- Thistle & Bee offers to sell products and gifts to congregations, often with exclusive first-to-purchase rights, and provides educational forums to hosting congregations.
- Thistle & Bee stores empty honey supers during the winter.

Ongoing

- Thistle & Bee regularly inspects colony health and grounds maintenance around the hives, and feeds hives in the winter and spring as necessary.
- Thistle & Bee offers mentoring and coaching as needed.

## ***The Theology of Bees***

*“The bee is more honored than other animals, not because it labors,  
but because it labors for others.” – John Chrysostom*

For more than one thousand years, many monastic religious communities have raised and cared for the honeybee. Not only have the apiaries been used to produce honey as a social enterprise, but the beehive has become a religious symbol and metaphor for the body of Christ. One of the unique characteristics of bees is their natural drive to work together for their common thriving. No bee could survive on its own, but instead plays a specific role in the community.

It is the role of the queen – or the God bee – to give birth to new life. That is her only role. And there can exist only one queen in a hive. It is the others that work to sustain this new life, to ironically sustain our own lives through pollination. This is an image for the work of the Kingdom of God, one that has been used by the church for as long as monastic communities have kept bees. And it is the role of Christians today, to nurture the life that God has created.

## ***Outreach as Economic Development***

Through the West Tennessee Pollinator Project, churches will invest (including seed money from Memphis Center for Food and Faith and the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee) an average of \$400 per hive on church grounds. This project anticipates 2-3 hives on each church property. By helping to develop a stewardship of creation that includes care for the pollinators of our earth, the program will generate an average of \$1200 of revenue per hive a year. This means churches who invest \$1200 into three hives have the ability to generate \$3600 of revenue for Thistle & Bee a year continuously, without more capital funds for at least three years. This revenue will pay salaries and costs for employing survivors of trafficking and prostitution.

For every \$400 invested in a church hive, Thistle & Bee will generate \$1200 of yearly revenue which will pay salaries and costs for employing survivors of trafficking and prostitution.

The Chronic Poverty Research Centre asserts that one of the key elements to alleviating chronic poverty is creating a high level of job quality as well as access to health services and education to be able access those quality jobs. "Escaping poverty involves access to more than basic education and health services, and that, while the quality of the latter is critical, large-scale investment in post-primary education and health systems is also now needed."<sup>1</sup> The intersection of health services, education, and quality jobs is the answer to poverty alleviation.

Church communities have excelled at applying crisis prevention methodologies to chronic health and poverty concerns of communities. For churches to best utilize their power for transformation they can leverage their purchasing power and investment in more just systems. In this model, instead of giving money away, the church helps cultivate a market for a meaningful business model to thrive, creating jobs and supporting a program that provides the survivors access to health services, resources, and employment education. This unique model works to create this intersection for churches.

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<sup>1</sup> Shepherd, Andrew, and Lucy Scott. *Tackling chronic poverty: the policy implications of research on chronic poverty and poverty dynamics*. Manchester, England: Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2011. Accessed at [http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication\\_files/Tackling%20chronic%20poverty%20webcopy.pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/Tackling%20chronic%20poverty%20webcopy.pdf)

## ***The Intersectionality of Environmental Stewardship and Justice***

This model is a response to the intersectionality of environmental stewardship and social justice. These are inextricably linked in ways that are not always apparent at a first glance. Whenever mother nature strikes, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, droughts, and famines, it is usually the poor and the marginalized who are affected first. In the case of floods, it is the wealthy who can afford to live in areas that are less susceptible to natural disaster. As healthier foods become more expensive due to the challenges of sustainability, it is the poor and marginalized that are affected first. This project aims at connecting environmental stewardship with social justice.

### ***Risks & Concerns***

For many, the honey bee elicits fear. A bee sting can be a painful experience, and for those who are allergic to bees, a very dangerous one as well. Churches that are going to place apiaries on their property do need to take proper steps to make sure that the congregation and the bees can thrive safely. Steps to take include:

- Informing Church Insurance that you have bees on your property.
- Place signage near your bees asking people to respect the health and wellbeing of your hives.
- Have a vestry conversation about safety and best practices.
- Keep your bees in a somewhat isolated area where unsupervised children should not encounter the hives.
- Hold workshops at your congregation about pollinator gardens and beekeeping.
- Remember – bees are a natural part of our ecosystem.

### ***Sponsorship***

If your church grounds are not suitable for a pollinator apiary, consider sponsoring hives either at a neighboring church or at St. Columba Conference Center where your congregations can visit.



### ***Churches with Beehives***

St. Peter's Episcopal Church, *Lebanon, Indiana*

St. Anne's Episcopal Church, *Reston, Virginia*

St. John's Cathedral, *Denver, Colorado*

St. Anne's Episcopal Church, *Millington, Tennessee*

Good Shepherd Mission, *Fort Defiance, Arizona*

Virginia Theological Seminary, *Alexandria, Virginia*

St. Columba's Episcopal Church, *Kent, Washington*

St. Columba's Camp and Conference Center, *Memphis, Tennessee*

### ***For More Information***

The Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee: [www.episwtn.org](http://www.episwtn.org)

Thistle & Bee Enterprises: [www.thistleandbee.org](http://www.thistleandbee.org)

Memphis Center for Food and Faith, a program of Memphis Tilth:

[www.memphistolth.org](http://www.memphistolth.org)

St. Columba Episcopal Camp & Conference Center: [www.saintcolumbamemphis.org](http://www.saintcolumbamemphis.org)

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