

## Grail Mission Initiatives in Brief

**Learning Labs**—a program that utilizes the 70+ acres The Grail owns in Ohio by offering space to nonprofits and community based organizations to pilot ideas prior to seeking funding or other outside support. Nonprofits do not as a rule get the opportunity to do “research and development” as the risk of failure is often high. Companies know that R&D—and especially failure—leads to breakthroughs and innovation. With Learning Labs we draw on old Grail concepts: 1. Recognizing that failure is ok as long as there is knowledge gained (The Grail called it doubling one’s talents); and 2. “student-led education” creates community strength and leadership (meaning, we do not tell people what we think they should be doing; we say we have this resource—will it help you reach your goals?). This is a low cost initiative to The Grail with potential for large community benefit. In addition to outside organizations, The Grail uses the Learning Labs initiative to experiment with land-based projects that advance the renewal of the earth and explore alternative food sources. Unlike the farming done before where food production was primary (with produce sold at farmers market, or distributed to shareholders with initial CSA) with education secondary, the Learning Labs flip the model and places education as primary goal. Any produce grown is incidental, and is shared with local food pantries.

Learning Labs initiative designed to run for 3-5 years as a mission initiative bridging the time until The Grail determines its future and to create opportunities for outside funding (grants and non-Grail donors). Mission Goals Advanced:

- challenging economic systems that put at risk the most vulnerable, especially women and children
- creating communities for a sustainable future

**Art at the Oratory (“AAO”)**—an initiative to utilize (vs keeping stored away) the wonderful art created or collected by Grail members over the last 80 years as a way to share Grail values, and the story of Grail women in collaboration with other community arts groups. This multi-pronged initiative includes exhibits, care of the collections, Girl Scout programming, and the AAO series (3 Grail artists partnered with a community arts group--marginalized artists-- that matches in genre producing an event/exhibition together; combined with a traditional museum-style exhibit telling more about the artist and The Grail). For example, the 2020 series (bumped to 2021 because of Covid) had Sharon Thomson (poet and play write) partnered with Pones! Dance troupe, Ingrid Farnham (fine arts-watercolors) partnered with Visionaries&Voices art studio, and the music of the late Lynn Malley with MUSE: Cincinnati Women’s Choir (will be pushed to 2022 because of Covid-19). The exhibits and series provide active connection points with the local arts community and school groups encouraging collaboration and also resource sharing.

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- celebrating the arts as a means for personal and societal transformation

**Summer Young Adult Work Initiative (“SYAWI”)**—built on the model of a temp agency, The Grail recognizes there is a lack of employment opportunities for young women (aged 14-22) that take into account transportation challenges, unusual scheduling, differing abilities, and financial need. For 3 months, SYAWI pick and choose assignments each week to work and are paid a living wage to do so. Assignments support Learning Labs (mission advancement), Art at the Oratory (mission advancement), grounds-keeping (trail maintenance and weeding for example), Cemetery support (weeding), outreach staffing, general support (mailings, filings, etc.).

This program has grown in 3 years to 18 crew members, and for the first time, all female. We have learned that in addition to the tasks assigned, leadership and critical thinking training need to be woven in so that when Crew finish the summer it has been a whole-person experience. Having said that, we hear from former Crew that their summers with The Grail enabled them to pay for school, or helped pay for housing at school. Please note that none of the Crew come into the program able to do any of the tasks assigned; they learn to learn, and to lead, and to try new things, and fail, to think and to collaborate. The experience is very Grail “doubling one’s talents” with the added benefit that many lower-tier tasks on the to-do list are accomplished.

Ideally, we would like to grow SYAWI into a network that connects this demographic with other nonprofits for employment across our region, especially Clermont County (our home county)--which as an Appalachian County has incredibly high unemployment rates. This would help the young adults with a diversity of options, and the nonprofits get the on call assistance they need without the financial burden of adding a staff person, and BOTH gets access to new communities and experiences. But growth is limited by lack of public transportation in the region (which prohibits who can participate to those with cars/gas/insurance--which means not necessarily those who need the employment the most).

One long-held thought is that we--The Grail--seek a grant to buy and support a small van and in addition to being the jobs coordinator amongst these nonprofits, we also become the transport that connects the youth to the jobs eliminating a major barrier to employment. There are large transportation grants available for this and we will apply this year for a 2022 grant (it is an 18 month grant process). Another option is to partner with an organization (like a local church) already set up to provide transportation rather than creating our own system. A local church has been identified and approached but they are small and barely functioning right now due to covid so conversations are slow.

Transportation is a HUGE issue across the region for all the nonprofits. If we did this it would be a "if Mohammed can't go to the mountain, the mountain will go to Mohammed" opportunity really flipping how nonprofits function and answering a pressing need. But until we are sure that The Grail will be moving in a direction that supports this growth after the General Assembly we do not want to commit precious resources to build it.

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- creating communities for a sustainable future
- celebrating the arts as a means for personal and societal transformation