



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#86 - February 2018

A Best Practice: Parish Gardens (Part I)

We know that people learn in different ways; often we learn best by doing rather than reading or participating in a workshop.

What about gardening? Is that a spiritual practice? Can preparing the soil and planting the seeds teach us and form us? Can caring for the garden root us in faith/spirituality and call us to be concerned for others and the world?

The garden is the initial core location of God's presence on earth; this is where God's presence is first manifest, both in giving instructions to humanity (2:15-17) and in declaring judgement (3:8-19).

The garden is thus the link between earth and heaven, at least at the beginning of human history.

The implication is that as the human race faithfully tended this garden or cultivated the earth, the garden would spread, until the entire earthly realm was transformed into a fit habitation for humanity.

But it would thereby also become a fit habitation for God.

- Richard Middleton in *A New Heaven and A New Earth*

What types of gardens are we talking about? Perhaps all kinds; perhaps there are many types of gardens:

- all have some similarities
- each has its own reasons and seasons

In this article, "Extending the Front Porch," Kendra Juskus gives an explanation of some types of gardens (flower gardens, prayer gardens, vegetable gardens, container gardens, wildlife gardens, native gardens):

<http://www.flourishonline.org/2010/02/extending-the-front-porch-is-your-church-ready-for-a-garden-2/>

Why are people drawn to create gardens?

- To provide a space for hospitality and meditation
- To enjoy nature
- To beautify the land around their homes or in community plots.
- To draw ourselves outside and into the world, often overcoming depression
- To create connections with others
- To have something to look forward to with each new season
- To teach children about gardening, about the gifts of creation
- To share produce with others
- To grow food locally, reducing the carbon footprint (*One staggering statistic shows that it takes 435 fossil-fuel calories to fly a 5 calorie strawberry from Calif. to N.Y. Buying local will save these energy costs and valuable non-renewable resources.* <http://observer.com/2008/05/the-environmental-benefits-of-organic-and-local-food/>)
- To intensify and find new ways to care for the earth

Some people involved in gardening, share with us:

- "The act of gardening can teach us something about ourselves, about our interdependence with the world of nature, about the relationships between work and creativity, and about how we might begin to discern those spiritual facts that elude us in other aspects of life. Gardening can also be an expression of community and conversation – another way to say that God is with us on the earth, a way to picture God's presence with us – through the gifts of nature and gardening together." - *Edythe Neumann who is helping Highland Community Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia establish a community garden*
- "I garden because I do not know what my life would be without plants, truth be told. They speak to me at some level I can't explain, each one in a slightly different voice. I garden because it's the only place (other than on some shrink's couch, maybe, which would probably be cheaper) that I can be myself, completely and absolutely. I garden because it makes me feel connected. – *Margaret Roach*; <http://awaytogarden.com/why-do-you-garden-2/>

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To read some further ideas on why people are drawn to gardening:

- Lessons from my Garden:
<http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201512/gardening-30490?utm>
- Creating a Faith-Based Community Garden:
<http://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/>
- Lessons from the Garden: Harvest and Gratitude:
<http://www.dailygood.org/story/1411/lessons-from-the-garden-harvest-and-gratitude-alanda-greene/>
- 10 Reasons Why I love Gardening:
<https://www.joyusgarden.com/10-reasons-why-i-love-gardening/>
- Why Do Gardeners Live Longer?
<http://wellnessmama.com/5437/gardeners-live-longer/>
- Lessons from the Garden Harvest and Gratitude:
<http://www.dailygood.org/story/1411/lessons-from-the-garden-harvest-and-gratitude-alanda-greene/>

America has garden fever and even faith communities are getting involved.

Community gardens are springing up in church parking lots all over the country.

And some urban churches have taken over vacant blocks of land that have stood empty for years or created rooftop gardens.

- Christine Sine

<http://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/>

Parish Gardens

Not only is the interest in gardening spreading among individuals; more and more parishes are exploring the reasons for and benefits of gardening

Kendra Juskus reflects: “Most American churches do not have a physical front porch where folks can gather to enjoy God’s fresh air. But the lack of a front porch shouldn’t inhibit the development of a front porch culture. An alternative outdoor space that is often easier for churches to construct than an actual front porch is a garden. Much like a front porch, a garden welcomes us into a relaxed, fresh air setting and encourages curiosity among passersby, strengthening community ties.” (<http://www.flourishonline.org/2010/02/extending-the-front-porch-is-your-church-ready-for-a-garden-2/>)



Listen to some voices of people involved in parish gardens, especially sharing their reasons and benefits of parish gardens:

- “The garden teaches at least two key messages beyond that of vegetables or lady bugs. One is for our church: to share, to cooperate with, to relax, to enjoy each and everybody whatever faith or worldview. The other is for our community: their capturing that these “church people” can be trusted, they do live out what they say, they love us... and ‘I want to know why.’ Somehow, some way this joint experience will transform lives and transform communities under God’s care.” - Jeff Littleton, who helped establish Five Loaves Farm which is developing a network of community gardens on church properties in Lynden, Washington
<http://lyndenfarmersmarket.com/>; <http://fiveloavesfarm.blogspot.com/>
- “... as they looked, thought and prayed, they realized that a garden would meet many needs in their community: fresh food for those in need, exercise and fresh air for old and young alike, conversation and relationship for the lonely, and last but not least, tender care for God’s

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good yet groaning creation.” - *From an opening parable in the Garden Manual: <https://arocha.us/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/GardenManual.pdf>*

- “For me personally fostering community and generosity are the most important kingdom values a church based garden can portray. Working together as a church community provides a wonderful sense of accomplishment and offers tremendous opportunity to strengthen inter-generational ties as young and old work side by side, weeding, watering and planting. You may even like to designate a special area as a childrens’ garden where children are allowed to choose what grows and when it is harvested.”

– Christine Sine: <http://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/>

- “I also think that incorporating sacred spaces within the garden is an essential part of this initial discussion. Depending on the size of the garden, places for people to sit and meditate, prayer walks, community gathering spaces, etc. are all possible ways to strengthen peoples’ faith beyond the activities associated with food production. Early monastic communities created walled gardens that were rich with biblical imagery, often centered around an apple tree, representing both the tree of Life in Genesis and the Cross of Christ.”

– Christine Sine: <http://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/>

- “I always look for gardens at various church locations because I have been an avid gardener all my life. My mother always had a flower garden at our Detroit house in the old neighborhood where I grew up. While playing in the backyard, she would pull me over and show me how to plant, tell me what the flowers were and how they grew, had me water them, watch them as they developed throughout the summer months.

More important than that was something I didn't realize until I began gardening in my own backyard when I was newly married in 1971. I remember mom telling me to ‘plant with a prayer.’ Every plant, flower, bush, tree had a prayer said over it. I did that when I planted and as mom did, dedicated my gardens to the Blessed Mother.

Perhaps that's why my mom's roses grew to great heights, always full and fragrant. The power of prayer! And I learned by her example to share the wealth, too. She would give clippings to the neighbors.

I learned a lot from those small gardens in Detroit: how to plant and pray and share and care with and about people as well as plants.

Parish gardens are a natural fit for what we as Catholics are meant to do. It's just another way of helping those in need, of sharing and caring, and even evangelizing in some ways.”

– Marilyn Giacobassi

- “Start with a small group of committed individuals, but work hard to involve the entire congregation in some way; look for ways to make the process educational, and to make connections to your faith tradition; enlist people, especially young people from the community outside the congregation; start small and do realistic planning, especially when it comes to people’s crops in the beginning; keep a garden log and update the congregation throughout the process; expect surprises and have fun.”

– Montgomery Victory Gardens, Silver Spring, MD



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To explore a few more thoughts and experiences of parish gardening:

- *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith*: <http://religionnews.com/2013/08/13/new-book-recounts-church-gardening-as-peacemaking-ministry/>
- The Community of Creation in a Seed: <https://godspace-msa.com/2016/04/22/the-community-of-creation-in-a-seed/>
- Garden of God's Heart: <https://godspace-msa.com/2017/04/12/garden-of-gods-heart/>
- Lessons from My Garden: <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201512/gardening-30490?utm>
- Repotting Plants – A Spiritual Exercise Of Growing: <http://godspace-msa.com/2016/05/26/repotting-plants-a-spiritual-exercise-of-growing/>

Yup, gardening and laughing
are two of the best things in life you can do
to promote good health and a sense of well-being.

- David Hobson

GEMS Suggestions

- Is now a good time to invite any master gardeners in your parish to read this **GEMS** issue and explore ideas for your parish?
- Walk around your parish with new eyes. Is there beauty? Respect for creation?
- During your parish picnic, hold part of it in and/or offer a tour of the parish garden (for those who might not know there is one!).

To be continued...

In the next two issues we will “visit” some specific churches which have embarked on

- Floral, decorative, meditative gardens
- Food gardens



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found in:

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>