



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#88 - April 2018

## A Best Practice: Parish Gardens (Part III)

Two months ago we explored some of many reasons to garden; last month's issue "visited" a few parishes that have flower and/or meditative gardens.

Another growing phenomenon in our society – and in parishes – is the cultivation of food gardens. We'll "visit" some of those places in this issue.

“...a growing number (of churches and synagogues) throughout the country are raising fruits and vegetables for soup kitchens and food pantries in what are often called food justice programs, in some synagogues they're known as mitzvah gardens.”

- [http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening\\_n\\_3283781.html](http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening_n_3283781.html)

Some of the Many Reasons Cited for Food Gardens:

- “The gardens serve a multifold purpose. In addition to providing fresh food to those who might not otherwise have access, the gardens are educational tools; they increase awareness of land sustainability; they teach congregants about farming and remind them of religious imperatives to care for the land.”  
- [http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening\\_n\\_3283781.html](http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening_n_3283781.html)
- “The committee was convinced: Garden they must; garden they would. They'd plant a garden for the sake of those in the community who lacked fresh vegetables. For people who would never listen to a sermon, but would talk with a neighbor while watering tomatoes.

They'd plant for the sake of the land, which was over-watered, over-fertilized and doused with pesticides. And they'd plant for the sake of the church itself, which needs to obey God's word to 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you...”

- *From an opening parable in the Garden Manual:*

<https://arocha.us/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/GardenManual.pdf>

- “A church garden can meet many needs - feeding the hungry, educating children, healing addicts, beautifying derelict property, overcoming racial divides, and more. And it can be more - a blessing, even long after the immediate needs are met.”  
- <https://arocha.us/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/GardenManual.pdf>
- “There are many reasons to start a community garden with your church congregation. The most common motivation for faith-based community gardens is the opportunity to help those in need, especially during these turbulent times. Others are concerned for their young and want to provide locally grown organic food and enable them to develop healthy eating habits. Still others are motivated by the desire to heal our earth or want to provide a beautiful green space for their congregations and neighbors to enjoy God's good creation.

A community garden is not just a place to grow food. It is a way to express our faith and interact with God and God's good creation. Perhaps one reason God created human beings to tend the garden is because God knew that it is in the midst of a garden that we connect most intimately to the character and ways of our Creator.”

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

- “In everything we have done as a ministry, a farm, a school and a community, over the past 25+ years, I'm beginning to believe that our decision this year to become 'keepers of seeds' is perhaps the most important. Why? As a planet we are losing the seeds of the earth and their loss brings a whole multitude of other losses in terms of related plants, insects, birds and animals. Once they are gone, these varieties and strains will be gone forever. Within the seeds are the DNA of the

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- world we and our ancestors have known.”
  - <https://godspace-msa.com/2016/04/22/the-community-of-creation-in-a-seed/>
- “Consider the following reasons for using your church’s resource of land to reach out to area refugees:
  - Be a bridge to your church’s community
  - Feed the hungry
  - Welcome the immigrant/“sojourner”
  
  - Share God's story
  - Demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ
  - Be good stewards of the land and share its produce
  
  - Care for the most vulnerable
  - Provide cross cultural experience for congregation
  - Build community and relationships”
    - <http://arriveministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Refugee-Gardening-Church-Gardening-Goals.pdf>

## Let’s visit some parish food gardens



Nan Onest, the pastoral associate at **Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Cedar Lake, IN**, says: “Some of the key principles of Catholic social teaching speak to the importance of caring for God’s creations,” also noting that its food program deals with “proper use of the land, food distribution justice issues and human dignity issues all at once.”

The congregation, which donates its harvest through its own ministry for shut-ins, as well as to a local soup kitchen, food bank and a home for unwed mothers, more than doubled its garden from 1,300 square feet last year, which yielded 1,000 pounds of produce, to 3,000 square feet this year. The number of volunteers also has tripled from about a dozen to 35.

“It’s been an amazing experience,” says Anita Torok, the garden’s organizer. “Some like the spiritual solitude of seeing the plants grow and

working with soil. Some like the family experience; a grandmother brings her grandchild and they hunt for the food to harvest. Some like the sense of purpose that they’re involved with a good cause.”

- [http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening\\_n\\_3283781.html](http://www.buffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening_n_3283781.html)



The “Garden of Eatin” at **St. Benedict the African East Catholic Church in Englewood, a neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side** grows tomatoes, kale, peppers, eggplant, and salad greens which is shared by the congregation, with donations of the excess to the local food pantry, says Susan Rashad, founder of the parish’s garden club: “We’ve developed some great relationships with other community organizations. It’s been a great thing being able to get out and share the job of doing the work.” Around five raised-bed plots and six container gardens church volunteers, police and fire department, baseball league players, and various community members pull weeds, plant, and get to know one another.



Carla Hlavac, Office of Religious Education, Youngstown, OH shares about the Community Garden at her home parish, an inner city parish, St. Patrick, Youngstown, OH. “Our church sits in a neighborhood that has experienced much urban blight. In 2007, the city demolished a couple of abandoned homes across the street from the church and our pastor said to me, “Either come up with a way to use that vacant land, or we’re planting grass!” (I was the DRE at the time.) We were looking for an opportunity to complement our Generations of Faith program that might engage younger children and their families, so we decided to start a 4-H Club in 2008 that would focus on gardening.



A parishioner built 4’ x 15’ boxes and we purchased topsoil, compost, and garden tools with funds from a grant. Over 30 children signed up and a parishioner from the Men’s Garden Club held informal learning sessions on

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Square Foot Gardening during our Saturday morning garden days. Children and their parents learned about soil composition, bad and good insects, and planting/weeding procedures. The club was a great mix of urban and suburban families and they participated in the county fair.

The next year, the gardens expanded over the entire 2-acre plot, and parishioners and neighbors reserved 20' x 20' garden spaces for their own personal planting. The parish worked with the city to hook up a water line for use in the garden and covered walkways with mulch from trees that were cut down on parish property. In subsequent years, a parishioner expressed interest in beekeeping, and he established a few hives in the back of the garden. Another member created a hoop house to extend the growing season.



Now, the above-ground boxes are used by community gardeners who want smaller plots. Produce from the gardens is used for our monthly spaghetti dinners. Garlic, canned soups, and honey are sold at the parish to raise money. Other produce is used by the growers at home or given to inner city families.

So many benefits:

- The gardens have brought in some new and active parishioners.
- The parish and neighborhood sees hope where there was once blight.
- Families and children have started their own home gardens.
- Our garden has become a model for many others in the inner-city.
- The charter school that rents our building uses the gardens for class.
- Our parish gardens have been featured in the local papers and on TV.
- The Ohio State Extension program hosts cooking workshops for neighbors at our building.
- It's been a great experience!"



Terri Condon, Youth Minister at [St. Charles-St. Ann's Parish, Syracuse, NY](#), relates their story: "Our youth group, YIM (Youth in Ministry), have been volunteering at the Matthew 25 Farm in Tully, NY ([www.matthew25farm.com](http://www.matthew25farm.com)) for six years. This farm was started in 2009 for the sole purpose of growing produce and donating 100% of the crops to local Food Pantries in and around the Central New York area.

The teens love it and we so look forward to our weekly Monday mornings on the farm. In the spring, we literally plant each seed one at a time. There are many chores to be done to ready the farm and we are always busy.

Before you know it, we are busy picking peas, beans, squash, zucchini, corn, tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, carrots, – every kind of produce including an orchard of apple trees.

The best part of our entire experience is loading all the produce into our vans and cars and driving it directly to the inner city Food Pantries. The food literally goes from the ground to the table in one day!



The pantry workers tell us that they have taught their clients how to cook squash, zucchini and fresh beans and peas. What better lesson for our teens than to plant and reap what they sow and then give it all away!



It takes us a half hour to get there by car and the conversation on the way there and back is better than any classroom lesson."





The Faith & Grace Garden, located on a grassy lot next to **St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in West Des Moines, Iowa**, has proved to be a vibrant ministry bringing together members of local churches, high school students, and the Boy Scouts to work in the garden. All vegetables grown in the Faith & Grace garden are donated to area food pantries and the local food bank. In 2010 over 4,000 pounds of fresh, organic vegetables were grown in the quarter-acre garden. For the 2011 planting season the Faith & Grace Garden grew to over 26,000 square feet with the plan to grow 10,000 pounds of organic vegetables.

Friday night is family night in the garden starting with a potluck at 6:00 pm followed by gardening and then closing with evening prayer. The children divide their time between the garden and the nearby church playground. For adults and children alike, this experience in the garden is a time of discovery about creation care and social justice.

- <http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/article/164/meeting-god-in-a-faith-garden>

## Explore Some Other Church Food Gardens:

- Church, Synagogue Gardens: Congregations Tend The Soil And The Soul With Community Gardening: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening\\_n\\_3283781.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/16/church-synagogue-gardens-congregations-tend-the-soil-and-the-soul-with-community-gardening_n_3283781.html)
- The Parish Garden that Brings Faith Down to Earth: <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201706/parish-garden-brings-faith-down-earth-31033?utm>
- Church Gardens Become a Growing Ministry: [http://www.richmond.com/entertainment/article\\_0503cc32-3be1-530f-8c16-0a99541dcc0e.html](http://www.richmond.com/entertainment/article_0503cc32-3be1-530f-8c16-0a99541dcc0e.html)
- This church – because of its food garden - has curtailed the storm water (a significant source of pollution) running off its church grounds by nearly a third. [http://www.bayjournal.com/article/eden\\_sprouts\\_from\\_va\\_churchs\\_community\\_rain\\_garden](http://www.bayjournal.com/article/eden_sprouts_from_va_churchs_community_rain_garden)

## Some Resources and Tips for Beginning a Church Garden

- Check with your local Master Gardeners. They usually need to volunteer their time to others. They would probably be glad to come and share tips and ideas with your parishioners.
- 10 Tips for Starting a Church Garden: <http://chreader.org/10-tips-starting-church-garden/>
- Homegrown Communion: Faith, Land and Neighbor: <http://www.ecfvp.org/webinars/57/homegrown-communion-faith-land-and-neighbor>
- This site lists multiple resources regarding church gardens: Christian Food Movement: <http://christianfoodmovement.org/directory/>
- How You Can Help Church Engagement: <http://arriveministries.org/how-you-can-help/church-engagement/church-refugee-gardens/resources-for-church-gardens/>
- Let's Move! Faith Community Garden Guide: <http://www.ecfvp.org/tools/148/lets-move-faith-community-garden-guide>
- Creating A Faith-Based Community Garden: <http://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/>
- An indispensable guide -- Why Every Church Should Plant a Garden ... How: <https://arocha.us/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/GardenManual.pdf>

## Some Prayers for Gardeners

- <http://beautifulcatholicfaith.blogspot.com/2009/06/its-gardening-time-catholic-prayers-for.html>
- <http://creativecountrymom.blogspot.com/2010/08/gardeners-prayer.html>

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- <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/prayer-garden>
- <http://hiddenhillsgarden.com/blog/?p=103>
- <http://www.coldspringgardenclub.org/gardener-s-prayer.html>
- <http://thecatholiccatalogue.com/three-freezing-saints/>
- <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prayers-to-care-for-creation.cfm>
- <http://worshipwords.co.uk/liturgy-for-blessing-gardens-and-gardeners/>

## GEMS Wonderings

- After these three months of reading and thinking about gardens (through these **GEMS** issues), has something new been planted in you? Has your spirituality been inspired, challenged?
- How might you adapt some of these ideas – at your parish but also in your own environment?
- Have these ideas about gardening raised your awareness of what goes into producing food?



## Adding New Luster to an Old Gem

**GEMS #62** explored using right brain techniques in adult faith formation as well as left brain approaches. This adult faith formation course, “Painting the Psalms,” planned for everyone: those with no artistic leanings as well as seasoned artists, is an intriguing example of using our right brain abilities (<http://www.buildfaith.org/2016/02/22/>).



## Golden Nuggets from You

**GEMS #64-66** explored ways that parishes today can be supportive of grandparents. Linda Smith shares with us: “I have found a wonderful way to stay close to my grandchildren that is not a program or event but is very special. My grands (in Papua, New Guinea) all know I love to read so they make me bookmarks.

Each card they make is so special because it comes from their hearts. And every time I open one of my many books and find one of their cards, I smile at the warmth of the memories and what went in to making those bookmarks for me.”

- Linda Smith, Co-director of adult faith formation and RCIA,  
Holy Cross Catholic Church, Atlanta



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Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at  
[www.janetschaeffler.com](http://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](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>