



# GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

*from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study*

#87 - March 2018

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

The publication of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and the growing awareness of care for our earth has led many individuals, organizations and parishes to the art of gardening.

Last month we explored some of many reasons to garden. This month we "visit" a few parishes that have flower and/or meditative gardens.



Cass Hooker, Director of Evangelization at **Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Hampton, VA**, shares the experience of her parish: "Our parish has a good size area devoted to flowers. There are many rose bushes as well as peonies and others. There is one prime volunteer gardener; other parishioners dabble in it. The flowers are used in the church to help save on the weekly order from a florist or flower wholesaler.

In conjunction with this is a smaller area that the religious education families clean up in the spring and plant with annuals. This has turned out to be a great spring event each year."



Owen Rees, a dedicated volunteer who organizes the Landscape Ministry at **Church of St. Mary, East Islip, NY**, shares their story: "Our Landscape Ministry consists of a Planning Team and many loyal volunteers whose

numbers are increasing each year. As a parish we claimed to be a welcoming community, but our building and grounds were not welcoming. Buildings were in need of cleaning and painting, the landscape was old and overgrown. Realizing that 'First Impressions are Lasting Impressions' and that it was our parish, we wanted to do something about it. With the enthusiasm and encouragement of our pastor, we made a plan with the help of a few parishioners who are landscape professionals.



*Before and After*

Our Landscape Planning Team meets several times a year to decide what needs to be done to maintain the current plantings and develop new plans.

There are three major events each year:

- Parish Clean-up (early spring prior to Easter)
- Landscape Beautification Project
- Fall Plantings (mums and ornamental cabbages)

Volunteers are solicited via our weekly Bulletin, social media and direct e-mail contact to our landscape volunteers. We invite, pray, encourage and thank all who volunteer."

Owen mentions some of the many positive results:

- "Our pastor has received many compliments regarding the 'new' beautiful landscape.
- There is an increase in the purchase of brick in the Sacred Heart Memorial Garden.

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- We also noticed that more parishioners are visiting the Memorial Garden for quiet time and prayer. Two benches, provided by the Boy Scouts, are available for prayer and meditation.
- Members of this ministry started and participate in our Men's Ministry as well as our Prayer for Peace monthly gathering.
- We have been encouraged with participation from our parish families, men and women and our youth, especially our Boy Scouts."



Deacon Ed Schmidt, Director of Christian Formation, **St. John Neumann Catholic Church, Powhatan, VA**, shares his personal views about his parish: "There are several groups in the parish who volunteer gardening time in our Columbarium. My office window looks out on it; many times I will look out my window to see someone strolling through or sitting on one of the benches enjoying the peace and beauty. I have done so myself. My thought is that any effort at a community garden should include a place of beauty as well as fruitfulness. We need to feed



both body and soul."

**St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, Canton, OH** has an extensive endeavor for gardening.

- The Garden Club plants memorial geraniums every year.
- The liturgy committee is responsible for the seasonal worship space environment. Due to their care of them during the 50 days of Easter, most of them are then planted on the outside grounds or given to parishioners to plant. (Nothing is wasted.)
- The Landscape Committee plants and maintains the gardens throughout the parish grounds (of which there are many).

This committee is comprised of 35 members, doing the work of planning, planting, weeding, watering etc. A yearly planning meeting in late March is advertised in the church bulletin, inviting all who are interested to join. With two large clean-up days (in the spring and fall), each person – or group - then has a section assigned to care for throughout the summer. The committee also works with a local high school for their senior students community work day: twelve students spend the day helping to mulch the areas.

**An overview of some of their many gardens includes:**

- The St. Francis Garden: surrounds the labyrinth. The labyrinth is in the center capped off with a beautiful sculpture of St. Francis of Assisi.
- The Children's Garden: a place for the youngsters for prayer and reflection
- The Pastor's Garden: begun in order to remember and honor the leadership of our parish. The newest garden will be the Sister's Grove which will honor the sisters that taught at the school or ministered in the parish over the years.



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- Memorial Trees: started twenty years ago to complete the landscaping of the new church. Most of the trees are flowering and are purchased as a memorial to a deceased loved one. They are forced into bloom, used in the Easter environment and then planted on the grounds. A granite marker with the memorialized person and the donor's name is placed at the base of each tree. There are now well over 100 trees planted and growing.



- Meditation Garden: located in a somewhat secluded area that is enclosed with glass to make it a very quiet area. With benches situated for people to sit, it is a very serene setting with beautiful rose bushes and other plantings.

Many of the committee members talk about their experience of the committee, how it has influenced them, formed them:

- “The committee itself is like a small community. We have worked together and grown together. I would think everyone on the committee would say we have learned from each other both about gardening and our faith. There is ownership for the parish and wanting everyone to enjoy our beautiful grounds. We have become a tight knit group and many of us worship together at mass.” *(Linda Casey)*
- “After raising our children I wanted to become more involved in the parish. Working outdoors and gardening fits my interest and is a way I can give back to the parish. I have met many amazing people. This has opened the door for me to become involved in other areas such as helping decorate the interior of the church and assisting the Garden Club in their annual geranium planting. I feel a deeper sense of belonging to St. Michael's Parish because of volunteering.” *(Barb Tolbert)*
- “This is my second year on the committee, and I am its youngest member (by a long shot). I've always enjoyed gardening and landscaping growing up, so this seemed like a perfect fit to both help the parish and to further my own interests and hobbies. Through my work on this committee, I've come to understand the importance of

God's creation in nurturing not only my own faith but that of the entire parish. Our building design and worship space are contemporary and are bathed in natural light, which is most conducive to interspersing plants and trees to remind the assembly of the essential connection of our faith to God's creative power in nature. This image is furthered by the effort we put into maintaining our parish grounds.

I've heard so many visitors to our parish speak of the warm sense of welcome they felt based on the appearance of the outer grounds, especially the large planters filled with seasonal plants near the main church entrances. Some, especially from smaller parishes, are awestruck at the beauty and variety of gardens and green spaces in our parish. Many have commented on the quiet, meditative nature our outdoor environment creates when entering our church for worship or other activities and events.



For my own faith, gardening and landscaping at the parish have provided me with a deeper appreciation for creation overall and a time for quiet reflection as I spend time in solitude watering, weeding and maintaining parts of the grounds. Creation itself must be fostered, cared for, and appreciated through time and effort. I'm also amazed at how well I now know some of my fellow committee members. A few of them have become my some of my closest friends at St. Michael's. As I've learned through experience, landscaping and gardening are definitely ways to foster faith in one's parish and in one's own life.” *(Trevor Ivan)*

Justin Huyck, Pastoral Associate at St. Michael the Archangel Parish, mentions that he has observed that “the landscaping team is a key evangelizing presence in the community:

- Because they are out around our campus, visitors often encounter them first, and so they are welcome, direction-givers, and warm conversation partners!
- Because people see them working, they are themselves a key sacramental sign of the church's mission, and that it includes care and cultivation of our earth, and nurturing the beauty that God gives us.

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- Finally, it is well known that - because of our size - St. Michael's has more resources than other parishes might have. Some might wonder why we don't simply hire landscapers for our grounds. So I think their ministry is a very visible act of stewardship - of the parish's resources but, even more, stewardship of their own gifts and energies - that God's love is alive in them in how they use their gifts for the church's mission."



Debbie Kraus, **Our Lady of the Lake Parish, Holland, MI**, shares that they have a Prayer Garden that has a walking rosary laid out in stones, Stations of the Cross throughout the garden and woods as well as an altar and ambo where liturgy is celebrated on Thursdays during the summer. Benches for quiet prayer and a reflective fountain with seats around it are included; people use these areas daily during the warmer months for prayer and quiet meditation.



## Some Other Resources to Explore

- Ideas for Children:  
<http://www.ecfvp.org/vestry-papers/article/155/tending-to-the-earth-with-children>
- Creating A Welcoming Place For God To Live:  
<http://godspace-msa.com/2016/10/17/meditation-monday-creating-a-place-for-god-to-live/>
- A Rocha UK provides various resources for churches:  
<http://arocha.org.uk/our-activities/churches/>
- 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.
- Old North Church, Boston, MA (<http://oldnorth.com/gardens/>) has many gardens. Note especially their Memorial Garden: the nation's first public memorial honoring American lives lost during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Originally, wooden "popsicle stick" crosses and stars of David marked with soldiers' names were glued to trellises. With the surge in deaths in 2006 and 2007 and many of the crosses being damaged during the New England winter, a more durable and less labor intensive symbol was sought.

A committee of church members and neighbors conceived a design of blank dog-tags (representing the number of fallen Americans) hung on chains strung between fence posts. The posts would form a semi-circle with a small garden within the circle, and a walkway and meditation bench along the perimeter.

Today, whenever an American falls during the Afghanistan or Iraq/ISIS conflicts, a dog-tag is hung by an Old North Gardener. The tags represent, as close as possible, the total number of deaths (6,884 as of July 4th, 2016).

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- You won't want to miss the ideas here: <https://godspace-msa.com/2016/04/21/earth-day-in-the-neighborhood/>. How might your parish do a:
  - Sun Tea and Herb Garden
  - Little Free Nursery
  - Neighborhood Orchard
  - Little Free Seed Library (<http://seedlibraries.weebly.com/>)
  - Bee, butterfly, and beneficial insects sanctuary

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the word 'creation' has a broader meaning than 'nature,' for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.

Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.

- *Laudato Si'*, #76

## GEMS Suggestions

- Who in your parish could bring some of the ideas in this issue to fruition?
- As spring approaches could you plan for something new on your parish grounds?

- Is there a Garden Tour coming up in your area? Invite parishioners to attend as group.
- If you have a parish garden, volunteer to be part of your community's Garden Tour.

## To be continued...

We've now explored gardening in the last two issues. Our third issue – in April – will look at parishes who cultivate food gardens.



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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>