



How does your garden grow?

Community gardens have grown in popularity with a focus on locally grown, healthy food. Some include plots for neighbors to till and others are large-scale vegetable gardens producing food for hunger programs and community meals. Church grounds can offer great sites for community gardens that offer hands-on ministry for the good of the neighborhood. Following are stories of Northeastern Ohio Synod congregations that have started gardens and a few tips for those considering starting one this spring.

Parma Lutheran Church

Shared by Brett Iafigliola

A broad expanse of green grass separated the back of the church building from a busy roadway. As we gazed upon this high-maintenance lawn, we wondered how we could use this essentially wasted space. So began the idea of the Parma Lutheran Church Community Garden, which could supply fresh produce to the Parma Hunger Center on site. In 2010 that was an unfilled need.

The project was designed to be budget-neutral and sustained by plot fees, grants and donations. Generous grants from Thrivent Financial, Woodmen of the World, and the Ohio State University Extension Service were crucial for start-up in 2011.

The garden needed to procure a zoning variance and fence permit from Parma. Then fencing, water storage bins (rainwater is harvested from the church roof), topsoil and compost were bought. After a successful start with 16 plots (4-by-12 feet) it expanded with eight more in 2012 to meet demand. As planned, the garden is now self-sustaining.

As we were breaking ground, we circulated an introductory letter to nearby homes and businesses to let them know about the garden and its mission. Community support has been outstanding. Neighbors stop by to chat and share encouraging words. We originally feared vandalism since the garden is highly visible from the street. But have only lost a few veggies to rabbits and deer. We will likely need to erect deer



netting above our chain-link fence this year.

Our garden requires those who lease individual plots to donate 10 percent of their harvest to the Parma Hunger Center. That has been a benefit in attracting gardeners who want to help the needy. At the center of the garden are dedicated plots where 100 percent of that produce is donated to the center. In all but our start-up year, the donated produce has totaled more than 1,000 pounds annually. The majority of our gardeners are church members, but a full third are from the community.

Our advice to other churches thinking of starting a community garden?

- Do it. But plan realistically and sustainably. What works for another garden may not be right for yours. Develop rules and expectations that applicants can review before signing up.
- It's easier to keep up with watering and weeding in the spring than in mid-summer. Gardening is a season-long commitment.
- Keep good records, financial and otherwise. We weigh all donated produce and send a year-end report and thank-you letter to donors.
- Above all, enjoy helping one another grow in faith, trust, knowledge and hope. There are many rewards besides the garden-fresh produce.

We would be glad to help with your planning and providing advice. Call our voicemail at 216-586-4186 or email parmalutherangarden@gmail.com.

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Emmanuel Lutheran Church, New Philadelphia

Shared by Kermit Nelson

We began our garden in spring 2009 after a proposal was presented to and approved by the council. The idea originated with Cindy Long, a former member who served on the council at the time. Our first intent was to donate our crop to the Dover/New Philadelphia Food Bank. But we later learned that they accept only monetary donations because they have contracts to buy what they need at discounted prices.

We developed a plan to display the fruits of our garden in the church lobby on Sunday mornings. Members and visitors can take what they need for a freewill offering. This practice has become popular during the summer months. At the end of summer, we donate all of the goodwill offerings to the Dover/New Philadelphia Food Bank.

The size of our garden is about 18-by-22 feet. Originally we planted tomatoes, bell peppers, eggplants, zucchini, squash, cucumbers, broccoli and Brussel sprouts. We used plants, not seeds.

Several years ago our custodian, Neil Rupe, and his wife, Barbara, became active with our garden, concentrating on green beans. They stagger the planting of three rows of beans from seeds. This allows for various crops of beans at different times during the summer. Their beans have become a popular item with church members. To make room for the green beans we discontinued the planting of squash, broccoli and Brussel sprouts.

For those starting a church garden, here are few things to think about:

- Determine the purpose of the garden.
- Plan the size of your garden.
- Determine the type of plants for your garden and if you want to plant seeds, plants or both.
- Map out your garden as to where the various categories of plants will be located.
- Assign individual responsibilities, such as tilling, planting, watering, weeding, fertilizing, pruning and harvesting of produce.
- Ensure your garden is fenced. Rabbits are everywhere!

Trinity Lutheran Church, Lakewood

Shared by Judy Fesko and Katie Stadler

The Peace and Plenty Garden on the grounds of

Trinity provides fresh produce for three community meals per month throughout the growing season.

The garden is a collaboration between the groups that serve community meals at Trinity, including the Northern Ohio Returned Volunteers Association; former Peace Corps volunteers; “Third Saturday,” volunteers that originated out of the Cleveland Foodbank; and dedicated volunteers, both members and non-members of Trinity.

Katie Stadler was our first gardener, working with a team that drew up plans, built the raised beds and the arbor, and sowed the first seeds.

The garden also provides Trinity with environmental education outreach opportunities and promotes the “greening” of our facility.

Most exciting is the opportunity for the site to serve as “demonstration gardens” where interested community meal guests and others can receive instruction about how to plant and tend their own vegetable gardens and build arbors, compost bins and sheds.

Every year the garden provides hundreds of pounds of produce used for our community meals or sent home with those guests.

Trinity’s garden was featured on the website of the American Community Gardening Association (communitygarden.org), whose 37th annual conference will be held in Cleveland Aug. 4-7.

St. Stephen Martyr Lutheran Church, Canton

Shared by Nancy Schoenbaum

The construction of the community garden at St. Stephen Martyr last summer had a dual purpose. First it was an Eagle Scout project for member Liam Smith. Secondly, it was a project that would be used as part of the ELCA day of service in September.

Liam and members of his scout troop constructed the planters and then filled them with dirt and planted tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers and zucchini.

They tended the garden and the produce was offered to members of our congregation and delivered to a local food collection group. On the ELCA day of service, the Community Harvest truck came to demonstrate the amount of food that could be donated. ♣

Best practices for stewardship

Fun and interesting

Shared by David Worsencroft of Divinity Lutheran Church, Parma Heights

This year the Stewardship Committee used three videos plus our regular temple talks from church members and Pastor Doug Gunkelman's summary sermon. We were inspired by the Ice Bucket video challenge. So on a Saturday morning, committee members ad-libbed about 14 short videos. One of our church members was our videographer.

This year's theme was "My Faith Goal." We began by discussing how we could achieve our faith goals by cutting back on our daily expensive stops at Starbucks or eating out at lunch.

The congregation's response was positive because there was humor and recognition that we need to increase our pledges. Check out the video at divinitylutheran.com (scroll to the bottom).

Each year I try to find an avenue that makes an impact and is simple to achieve. Equating the mission of Divinity with the dollars pledged seems to be what works.

'Personal, believable'

Shared by St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Medina
Combining a dramatization with a relevant and important message captured the attention and imagination of St. Matthew members.

When planning Consecration Sunday this past fall, Jackie and Ken Jordan of the Stewardship Team volunteered to present the Good News Moment, "Grow One Step." Rather than simply reading the script and offering suggestions of ways members could dig deep to give back to God through their offerings, they dramatized a conversation at the "kitchen table" regarding stewardship.

Like most married couples, they have experienced joys and challenges, including a life-threatening diagnosis for their son prior to his birth. Several times Ken experienced employment problems, but through much prayer and faith he stayed the course and quickly found new work. Jackie has had many health issues, but through a profound faith she has found other fulfilling ways of using

her numerous spiritual gifts to glorify God.

Their story was personal, believable and relatable. It was during these tough times that Jackie and Ken most relied on their strong faith in God to persevere. After discussing the events that brought them even closer to God, they pondered the question, "What is God calling me to give to him through gifts to St. Matthew?"

These stories were peppered with the Grow One Step presentation, so everyone in attendance could consider the same question and personally consider what God is calling them to give back in response to their many blessings.

Consecration Sunday generated positive energy and results for St. Matthew.

Mission giving; mission budgeting

Shared by Chris Laux of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Bellville

Here's what most congregational budgets look like: salaries, utilities, building maintenance, office supplies, Sunday school curriculum and other expenses broken down into specific line items as we account for every penny we may need and spend. Don't get me wrong, it's an important process as we are called to be responsible stewards of the gifts that God has given us and therefore our church. But what if there is a different way of looking at the budget and how and why we give?

Do you budget in a way that promotes and supports your church's mission? Do you know what the mission of your church is? At St. Paul we are working toward that goal. Our mission is "Living & Sharing God's Love." We live and share our faith in Jesus Christ by trusting God with all our heart; learning God's desire for us; telling others about God's love; and caring for others using the gifts God gives us.

Over the last couple of years we have taken steps toward having our budget reflect

our mission. We've eliminated or consolidated redundant line items. Our budget categories right

Bishop helps seminarians learn liturgy in Spanish

Editor's note: This article first appeared in *Te Deum*, the alumni magazine of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus. It has been edited for publication here.

Northeastern Ohio Synod Bishop Abraham Allende has lent his voice to a series of audio programs designed to help seminary students, pastors and other church leaders conduct the liturgy in Spanish.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary near Columbus produced two sets of 21 audio programs, most less than five minutes long. They feature Allende and the Rev. Leila Ortiz, pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Gaithersburg, Md., doing line-by-line readings of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and other portions of the liturgy, with pauses for the listener to respond after each line. Three of the programs are about 30-minutes and feature three versions of the entire eucharistic service, read line-by-line in Spanish, with pauses for listener responses.

These liturgical audio programs are used by Trinity students enrolled in Spanish for Ministry classes. The students can put the programs on their iPods or smartphones and listen to the liturgical readings while driving or doing housework. The recordings have been a huge hit with Trinity students and they are now available to anyone as downloads from the homepage of the seminary website.

"I don't know any other seminary that is doing this," Allende said. "It's great that Trinity is taking that forward-thinking step, and anything I can do to enhance that I am willing to be a part of."

Born in Puerto Rico, Allende moved with his family to the mainland at age 7. The family settled in southwestern Pennsylvania, where his father worked in the steel mills. His family continued to speak Spanish in the home, allowing him to maintain his fluency with the language. Allende completed his studies for the ELCA TEEM program at Trinity 15 years ago. He served his first call as mission developer of *Iglesia Luterana la Trinidad*, a Spanish-speaking congregation in Canton.

As Trinity students and the seminary's Hispanic Ministry Task force are learning, "it isn't enough to



learn the language. It is learning who the people are and that you care for them," Allende said.

As a mission developer, he often had to serve as an advocate for his members in the hospital, in court and at school.

The ELCA has become more aware of the issues facing immigrants, particularly when it comes to documentation and unaccompanied minors, he said. "We are becoming a voice of the marginalized," he added.

Ortiz also is a native of Puerto Rico and was a presenter during Trinity's Great Lakes Theological Academy last summer. There she shared her knowledge and passion on the topic of Protestant Latino/a liberation theologies in the U.S., observing: "When Latino/as come to the Lutheran church from another tradition, they tend to make it their own and find a sense of belonging within the tradition, theology and liturgy. This appropriation does not erase their formation. Instead, faith traditions merge and the Spirit brings about something fresh, new and exciting. This, in turn, gives a bright new flavor to the tradition already in place."

While students at Trinity learn to recite the liturgies in Spanish they, too, are becoming aware of the unique spiritual needs of the Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. and the bright, new flavor this population brings to the church and world. **L**