Why

Every Church Should Plant a Garden

...and How

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Foreword

For many people, environmental stewardship can be controversial. Apparent political divisions, economic tradeoffs and differences over the cause and severity of challenges and the choice of solutions complicate matters. The challenge in knowing exactly what to do and how to do it, however, does not relieve us of our responsibility to care for the planet on which we live.

As a Christian conservation organization working in 19 countries on five continents, A Rocha helps restore and protect forests and fields, streams and lakes and the people who live near them and so often depend upon them for their very lives. We do this in response to the biblical mandate to care for that which God created. Indeed, A Rocha, means “the rock” in Portugal where we began in 1983.

The A Rocha Difference: Christians in Conservation
In an ever-growing field of conservation organizations, A Rocha is unique. Among secular environmental groups, A Rocha stands out as a visible expression of God’s love for all of creation. In fact, we are the only Christian organization in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature—an alliance of more than 1000 conservation organizations.

Among “creation-care” organizations, which focus primarily on lifestyle change and political advocacy, A Rocha is known for our scientific research, hands-on conservation and community development projects and educational programs.

Driven by local context, local needs and local leaders, the particular focus of A Rocha projects varies around the world. Each, however, adheres to our five core commitments:

- Christian: Underlying all we do is our biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.
- Conservation: We carry out research, conduct projects and run education programs for the conservation and restoration of nature and the well being of people.
- Community: We work in local communities where we live, work and worship.
- Cross-cultural: We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.
- Cooperation: We work in partnership with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share our concerns.

A Rocha in the USA
Around the world, people are starving, forests are dwindling and species are going extinct—in part because we have ignored and at times distorted the call to steward the earth. On top of that, an unbelieving world is watching to see what, if anything, Christians will do to care for the planet and the people we claim God created. We have often failed to live out what we say we believe. The ecological crisis, then, is actually a church crisis. And the size, wealth and global influence of the American church give it the unique ability to lead a response to this crisis.

To aid that response, A Rocha is helping facilitate a network of projects across the nation—some operating as A Rocha projects, others as independent A Rocha Affiliates, still others as simply friends serving a common cause . Each will vary according to local needs and desires—from growing food for the poor to helping farmers improve their yields to restoring streams, meadows and forests. Yet, each integrates and balances the needs of people with those of the rest of creation. Each combines hands-on conservation work with education. Each done as the hands and feet of Jesus.

We at A Rocha hope your church, organization or group of friends will join in the blessing of connecting your lives with others in this unique and winsome way. To help you get started, this little booklet provides the basics. With it, a little help from local experts (whom we’ll help you find), and the desire to make it happen, you will be well on your way. Plant a garden. Be a blessing. And be blessed!

Tom Rowley, Executive Director, A Rocha USA

First: A Parable

There once was a church that longed to do more. Oh, it already did plenty—Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, a youth group and a counseling center, parents' night out and of course three services on Sunday. Still, the church longed for something to get outside its walls and connect. Not only with its members, but with the people of its community who had never—and would never—step inside. It wanted to make a difference.

So, like most churches (especially Presbyterian ones) they appointed a committee, and sent them off with prayers, a potluck and a three-month deadline.

The committee, a group of wise men and women, knew that Scripture was the place to start. And there—perhaps by Divine intervention—they encountered this directive to the exiled Israelites:

Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and

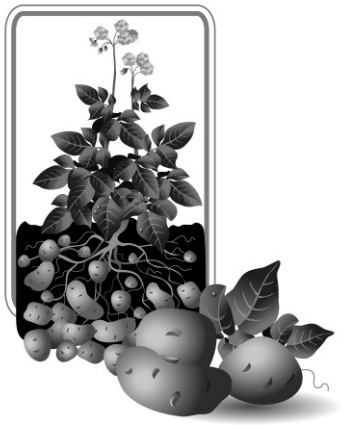
prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. Jeremiah 29:5

It dawned on the committee that the church was, in many ways, an exile in today's culture. At best, praying that it would change, but doing little to change it. At worst, focusing solely on itself and its members. Here in these verses, it seemed, was the answer: Like the exiled Israelites, they were to become rooted where God had put them and seek the good of the community.

Build and settle, of course, they understood. Ditto for marrying and increasing and praying. But the bit about planting gardens? That was new to them. This was the city after all. Not some town in Iowa. There's was a church of teachers and lawyers, realtors and homemakers, not farmers!

Yet 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 good yet groaning creation.

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..."



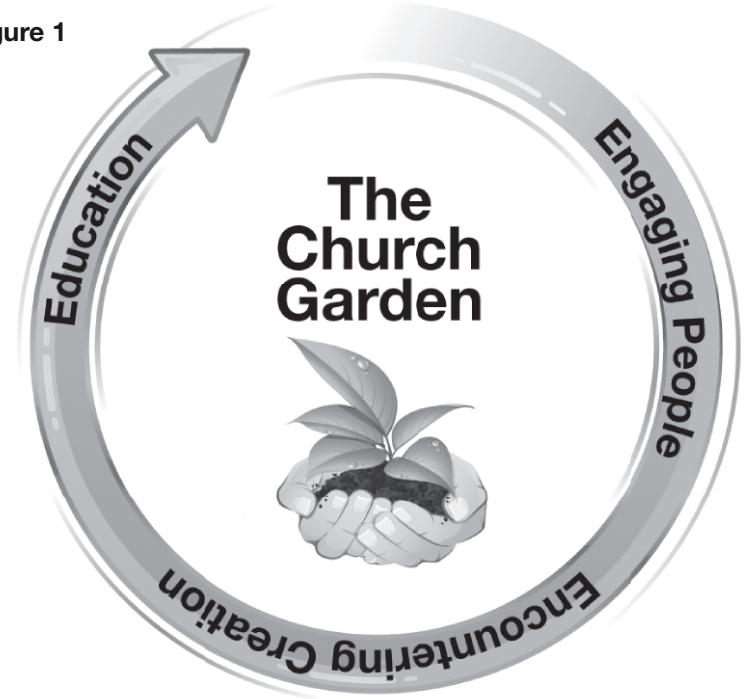
The Church and a Garden

The Bible is strong on gardening. Whether in Genesis, Jeremiah or the Gospels, gardens play a prominent role in God's plans. It even starts in one. A garden is a wondrous place where we can "meet" with the Lord and marvel at His miracles. It's a place to love your neighbor, care for creation and grow veggies. No wonder churches everywhere are interested in them. They see them as a way to meet local needs. Some have planted food-pantry gardens, giving produce to food banks. Others rent plots on church grounds as a way to use the land productively and respond to a tight economy. Still others have reclaimed derelict inner city properties, transforming vacant lots. In the process, gardeners from these projects have enjoyed a greater sense of community, a joy in connecting with the natural world and a healthier diet. All of which is good. But church gardens can be much more. They can meet needs and at the same time celebrate the bounty of God's good earth. A way to grow both food and community. A way to honor and care for people and for the planet.

Figure 1 demonstrates the life history of a community garden. (I use "community garden" and "church garden" interchangeably for a reason—the church garden should be a garden with and for the community!)

It involves managing and honoring both the human and the nonhuman. Its proper focus is both process and product. The fruit of the process is often intangible—greater connections between people, psychological health, improved race relations, better community ambience. The product—the quality and quantity of food produced and the health of the land and all the creatures—is concrete—an indicator of how the gardeners understand and interact with creation.

Figure 1



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.

Engaging People

In general, the best way to organize a sustainable community garden is with the 'do with' rather than the 'do for' approach."[1] *—Jim Flint, Director of the Vermont Community Garden Network*

As with so many "projects," it is easy to skip past the people that must be involved and instead focus solely on the "product." That is a huge mistake. Cultivating relationships with the people involved (both inside the church and out) is every bit as important as the tomatoes and cantaloupes grown. Indeed, cultivating those relationships—just like cultivating the soil—is absolutely essential to the long-term and health and productivity of the garden.

Jim Flint coined the acronym ASPIRE for the steps needed to move from idea to a healthy, sustainable garden. Know your Audience, start Small, make Plans, create an Identity, establish Roles, celebrate with Events.[2] We use it here as a way to organize the booklet.

A - KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing your audience – who you want to reach or serve – enables you to make five key decisions and a commitment, which form the foundation for your garden. Think of this as cultivating and nourishing your human soil.

Key Decision #1 – In addition to the blessing, what other purposes will the garden serve?

Begin with a small committee of three or four people charged with exploring the needs of the community. Think about why the church is considering a community garden. List every reason. But don't stop there—schedule a general meeting of all interested parties and ask them for their ideas and concerns. Invite those in your congregation, your neighbors, and from organizations within your community. Their thoughts may surprise you.

If you are thinking of growing food to donate, invite someone from the organization you hope to support. Are there groups in the community who are equipped to take your harvest and pass it on? Invite someone from the scientific community, from Master Gardeners, from those concerned with agriculture, wildlife conservation, or community health. Have a brainstorming session. Think broadly—outside the box. What are the social, economic or health issues concerning your neighborhood? Are there historic, aesthetic, psychological, or political concerns that affect your community? List them all. What resonates with your audience? What energizes or excites them? Consider your church's intent. Where does its passion intersect with the concerns of your audience? What issues can be addressed by a garden? What is within your power to tackle? Narrow these concerns down to a clear, easily articulated purpose that can appeal to your church and your audience.

Key Decision 2: What is the church's involvement?

A church can be involved in a garden in many ways. It can plant, own and operate the garden on church land. It can make it available to others to garden. It may lease or otherwise obtain land elsewhere for the garden (for example a vacant, derelict lot). The church can provide volunteers, water for irrigation, funding, etc. In short, the range of possibilities for church involvement is wide. What makes sense for your church?

Key Decision 3: What style garden will you choose?
Most church gardens are structured as allotment, communal or a combi-

nation of the two. Allotment gardens are parceled out with individual gardeners being responsible for their own plots. The plots can be used free of charge or rented; but typically gardeners are required to sign an agreement covering issues such as organic/non organic techniques, plot upkeep and gardener responsibilities. Gardeners may also be asked to donate a portion of their produce to feed those in need. The garden may also include a demonstration plot where new gardening techniques are highlighted.

Communal gardens are just that—everyone shares the work and the produce. Alternatively, all or a portion of the produce can be distributed to those in need via the church itself, food banks or other agencies.

Each style offers human management challenges that need to be addressed with planning, clear roles and communication.

Key Decision 4: Who will be your champion and their core support group?

Leaders and volunteers are the water or lifeblood of your garden. Use their energy and talents wisely. Dave Timmer, A Rocha's Project Director in Lynden, Washington has helped start a number of community gardens in the Pacific Northwest. Through that experience, he's seen the importance of finding and supporting a garden champion and building a group of core supporters around him or her. It's critical to have at least one person who can focus on the garden and see it through from idea to planting to harvest.

A good champion can infect others with a vision. They create a hunger to be a part of whatever project they undertake. They may also be good at seeking initial donations or planning key events. Once the garden is established they may want to pass their role on to someone who is a good maintainer, but the champion's job is to begin.

Amy Lee, a veteran church garden starter, put it this way: "Find someone who has a passion for working hard to change people's lives, to lead the project. It is extremely time consuming (in the beginning at least) for the person in charge, but the satisfaction in knowing you are doing something

to truly change the world around you is amazingly satisfying."[3]

To guard against burn out of that champion, recruit a strong support group of volunteers. Take time to build the core team. Include individuals who are skilled in caring for people as well as those who are knowledgeable in organic garden techniques. Assign people to explore garden issues such as site selection, funding, drafting guidelines, publicity, etc.

Key Decision 5: Who are your potential partners?

Most communities have US Department of Agriculture Extension Agents eager to answer questions about crops, planting techniques, gardening for pollinators, and perhaps even food preservation. Master Gardeners offer their knowledge as a gift back to the community. Some organizations are expert in planning volunteer appreciation programs. While you can learn about gardening from books, your gardening experience will be enriched by inviting others to help. Each garden is different. Identify all your community resources. Look within and beyond church walls. See the Resources section for more organizations committed to community gardening.

Peter Harris, founder of A Rocha, has this to say about reaching out and collaborating: "Christians may live within a different philosophical universe than others, but we all share the same physical and psychological one. We can work together with anyone who is concerned with caring for creation."[4]

Explore the resources in your community and begin to build long-term partnerships.

Key Commitment: Do no harm; grow for the long-term.

Organic gardening provides an excellent model for both garden techniques and human relationships. Plants must battle against other plants; insects; disease; drought; flood; heat; cold; and pollution of earth, air and water. These obstacles can be dealt with via quick, band aid approaches (e.g., chemical pesticides and fertilizers) or they can be handled sustainably, creating an environment where plants can prosper and pests or diseases

Checklist for Fundamental Decisions

1. Audience		
a. What is the purpose of your garden?		
b. Who will the garden serve?		
c. What community challenges does the garden address?		
d. Have you sought input from all interested parties?		
e. Did you think outside the box?		
2. Garden Style a. Will your garden be an allotment (plot) style?		
b. Foodbank style?		
c. Combination?		
d. Will the garden be on church property?		
e. If offsite, where will it be and why?		
f. Will the church act only as a sponsor?		
g. Will this be a church project?		
3. Your core group		
a. Who will be your 'champion'?		
b. Who are the members of your support group?		
c. Do you have someone skilled in organic gardening techniques?		
d. Someone whose gifts are caring for people?		
e. Who are the individuals tasked with exploring key challenges and their tasks?		
4. Your partners		
a. Social organizations?		
b. Master Gardeners?		
c. Scientific or Agricultural?		
d. Others?		
5. A 'do with' approach		
a. Will your garden be organic?		
b. Will you seek to create an atmosphere of 'do no harm' for volunteers?		

are uncomfortable. Organic gardening seeks to strengthen the garden for the long-term.

The same is true for the human side of gardening. Human interactions, distresses, the challenge of nurturing or encouraging can be the most time consuming part of community gardening. People can be less forgiving than plants, but the rewards of caring for them are great. A church that is committed to both the process (working with people) and the product of the garden (growing food) will recognize that reaping any kind of harvest involves time, work and weeds. From the beginning, set your sights on growing your garden organically, both for the plants and the people.

S – START SMALL

"Start small so that you can balance garden programming (educational and fun activities) with garden maintenance (work projects – and upkeep – which can also be fun)." [5] *—Jim Flint*

Site selection is the next important step in starting a community garden. A healthy vegetable garden requires at least 6 hours of sunlight throughout the growing season (spring, summer and fall), easy access to clean water, and be located on fairly level ground. It is not necessary to find perfect soil. Soil can be built up and enriched through the process of gardening. But the soil must be free from heavy metals and other pollutants that would contaminate your harvest and spoil your efforts. If in doubt, have the soil tested for contaminants before deciding on a particular site.

What land is available? Would the site be large enough for the style garden you have proposed? Is there room to expand? Was the land poorly treated, requiring a lot of soil enhancement or special techniques such as raised beds instead of in ground gardening? How is the site currently used? Can its use be easily changed? Would this site be accessible to prospective gardeners? Would they feel safe if gardening alone? Are there any zoning or legal restrictions that would prohibit a community garden on the site? And finally, who owns the property?

Whether gardening on church grounds or off site, seek to obtain a lease

clearly stating that you have permission to garden, with a set time frame and any restrictions that might apply. Seek a lease or agreement for at least three years. Gardeners need land security to confidently improve the soil, certain that they will be able to reap the rewards of their investment. These agreements should include a 'no fault clause' alleviating the property owner's concerns for liability. A sample permission agreement and a claims release form are included in the Appendix.

Insecure land tenure is one of the major challenges to community gardens. This is especially true for inner city gardens or those reclaiming vacant lots. The process of gardening often improves the ambience of the neighborhood enough for the land to become valuable to developers for other purposes. In this case, it is important for the gardeners to keep track of the produce of the garden – that portion that is measurable – the harvest, the habitats created for pollinators, etc. This concrete data, combined with the unseen but valuable effects of the process of gardening might help a garden renew its lease multiple times.

Allow your garden to grow slowly. Choose a few goals – things you know your community would miss if your garden were not there. Recognize that the first year will be a time to experiment – what works and what does not. Expand through what you learn.

P - MAKE PLANS

"One important key to success is self-confidence.
An important key to self-confidence is preparation."
—Arthur Ashe

Starting a community garden requires three elements: readiness (a vision), preparation (planning) and diligence (hard work). A number of organizations, such as those listed under Resources, are committed to helping organizations start and grow community gardens. The planning stage is a wonderful time to tap their wisdom, whether in setting up guidelines for people, or preparing your site. Plan as much as possible for three key areas (people, site design and funding) before you begin and then, adapt.

A. Planning for the gardeners

"For the gardener the process of growing food and flowers entails both a responsibility to nurture and the opportunity to be nurtured." 6 Laura Lawson

Volunteers are more than hands and a strong back. They are there to grow with their garden. People function best when they know what is expected of them, have participated in creating the rules or guidelines, have a clear path for resolving differences, and the opportunity to be useful and appreciated.

The challenge of an allotment garden is to help individuals, planting their own separate plots, succeed without harming nearby plots. Key questions to address are: How will plots be assigned? Will there be a rental fee? What are the responsibilities of each gardener? Why and how will plots be reassigned? What are the rules of the garden? What types of plants will be permitted? How will gardeners be recruited? Will each gardener provide their own tools? Will there be a storage space provided? Each garden should draft its own guidelines, but the Appendix includes a sample gardener agreement, rules and guidelines to stimulate ideas.

A food bank or communal garden faces a different challenge – how to share garden tasks so it benefits both the gardeners and the garden. Here gardeners are working for the common good, not their own, and some chores such as weeding become much less appealing. Create a checklist of garden maintenance chores throughout the entire gardening season and recruit individuals for all of these tasks. Don't assume people will just show up. Determine how you will encourage your garden volunteers through the entire season. Major tasks, such as building a fence, planting or harvesting could, with planning, become celebrated events. Plan how you will obtain tools and where they will be stored.

Would your gardeners benefit from basic gardener training? Local Master Gardeners or the Cooperative Extension Service might welcome the opportunity to share their excitement. Plan a class prior to putting the first seed in the ground. Even gardeners who help in a food bank garden can apply what they learn. Decide how you will distribute the harvest.

Often the garden produces more that can be managed. Think of the many ways you could use the fruit of your labors and make arrangements before you begin. You cannot assume a shelter will be prepared for an influx of tomatoes unless you ask.

How will you handle vandalism? Human theft can be lessened by having a presence in the garden every day. Make friends with the garden's neighbors. Place odd vegetables (for some, eggplant qualifies) along the easily accessible parts of the garden, less appealing than a ripe tomato. A fence may be necessary and a thorny vine – whether roses or raspberries – can discourage theft. Some gardens have planted a 'gleaning' or 'vandal's garden' with a sign – "Free, pick here", fully intending the produce to be picked by those passing by.

B. Site Preparation

Organic gardening techniques are explored in the Encountering the Garden section, but several key decisions need to be made during the planning stage. These include: clearing the land, preparing the soil, creating a garden design and maintenance plan.

Does the land need to be cleared? Would a volunteer day be sufficient to remove debris or will you need to enlist outside help? How has the soil been treated in the past? A soil test, including pH and nutrient levels, will enable you to determine the specific soil improvements you may need to make. The local land grant college or Cooperative Extension Service office can provide a listing of regional soil testing labs as well as the specifics for gathering a sample and interpreting the results. "Selecting and Using a Soil Testing Laboratory" in the Resources Section is an example.

The condition of the soil will also determine whether in-ground planting will be possible or raised beds will be necessary. Both have advantages. Raised beds are an additional expense and can dry out faster than in-ground plantings. However, they can be put in where the existing soil is unsuitable, they are less prone to weeds, they warm the soil more quickly in the spring and can produce greater yields because of higher soil fertility and room for root growth.

Several methods, depending on the region, enable you to prepare the ground while conserving the soil. Initially you may need to till it, either by hand or by machine. Ultimately, the less tillage the better for the health of important soil organisms and erosion control. Some techniques, such as sheet composting or "lasagna gardening' enable you to build gardens on top of existing sod or grass without turning the soil. The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Center (www.attra.ncat.org) is a vast storehouse of information on these types of topics.

Now is also the time to develop a garden design and year-long site management plan. For the allotment style garden, this would include determining the size and spacing of plots, walkways and common areas. Paths should be wide enough to be handicapped accessible. Each gardener should have easy access to water. A food bank garden's design may also include a variety of plots. Having at least four separate plots enables the gardeners to cycle or rotate crops to minimize disease and pests. Having a specific place and method for composting will conserve resources, provide for your soil's future and minimize confusion on dealing with garden waste.

Beauty, or aesthetics, can be important to a church ground's committees or neighbors. Planting flowers for bees and butterflies, while improving your garden, might also be part of addressing this concern. A pollinator garden is most effective if it provides clusters of flowers throughout the season rather than single flowers scatter around the garden. You may designate an area as a specific pollinator garden, or surround the entire garden area with flowering plants. A garden requires year round maintenance. Many of the websites included under Resources have region specific garden calendars that can be helpful in identifying key tasks during each season.

When all is ready, how do you decide what to plant? Allotment gardens allow individuals to choose. However, either style garden might consider choosing varieties that thrive in your region, are nutritious but expensive to purchase, or are crops that can be preserved through the winter. A food bank garden might seek input on what vegetables would be most

useful to local shelters and food pantries. The goal might be to create a garden that provides a sustainable food supply for as long as possible. Cold season crops, such as spinach, could be planted in early spring. Once harvested, their space could be used for tomatoes or another warm season crop.

Key Financial Planning Questions

A. Tasks:	Yes? No?	Will they be donated?	Are funds needed?
A. Does the land need to be cleared? How will this be accomplished?			
B. Will tilling be necessary? Who will do this? Cost?			
c. Was a pH and soil test performed?			
D. What soil amendments are needed? What will this cost?			
E. Who will supply seeds? What seeds are needed? What will be the cost?			
F. Are any tools needed? How much with they cost? Where will tools be stored?			
G. Will publicity be needed to recruit gardeners? How will this be accomplished? What will this cost?			
H. Who will supply water? Will hoses or other devices be needed to carry water to gardeners or plants? Who will pay the water bill?			
I. How will we restrict vandals and define the garden boundaries? Will a fence be needed? What type and how will we obtain the materials? Will a cost be involved?			
J. What are other anticipated expenses?			

C. Funding – How will you support your garden?

Many community gardens begin and prosper for years on a volunteer/ donation basis. Try this for the first year or two. The attached chart highlights some needs that could be an expense or the opportunity for a donation. Local businesses, which contribute to the community, may be willing to do some of the work or provide needed supplies. Your garden may become a choice assignment for agricultural interns from a local college. High school students, needing to contribute community service hours may also become good, consistent workers. Some gardens begin by raising start-up costs from the congregation. Consider how you will pay for on-going expenses, such as water. Allow yourself time to grow and explore what you will need, building your long-term commitment to the community at the same time. Eventually you may want a paid Garden Manager. At that time you will want to explore grants. Funding for the garden will require creative efforts – finding interested resources and sources, acknowledging gifts and donations, and celebrating the valuable efforts of all volunteers and donors.

A good plan, which includes guidelines for gardener participation, preparing and managing the site, and funding, will smooth many of the rugged places of starting a community garden.

I - CREATE AN IDENTITY

"It is a natural draw to the church. Countless conversations have occurred with neighbors, agencies, and people walking by that wouldn't have happened without these gardens. Giving away food disarms people. Connections are natural. We put a (rental plot style) garden in a trailer park this year...we now have a connection to the marginalized in our community, which never would have happened at church. Food bank gardens put flesh on the gospel."[7] *—Dave Timmer*

Community gardens provide psychological benefits to a wide range of people. Individual lives can be changed, strengthened and encouraged. This fruit of working together often begins with a conversation in a safe environment. Therefore choose your garden's name carefully. Avoid God

language that shuts people out or makes them uncomfortable. A good name can be a conversation starter inviting curiosity. “Five Loaves Farm” captures the intent of a network of community gardens in the Pacific Northwest (www.fiveloavesfarm.blogspot.com. The name becomes richer when participants learn the story of the loaves and fish in the gospels, but it does not exclude those who are not involved in a church.

The Anathoth Community Garden grew out of a response to a murder that upset a rural North Carolina community. The local church and community held a joint prayer vigil and then began to carefully consider issues affecting life in their area. They hosted a series of community discussions on “Food-Faith-Farm.” From this grew the idea of a community garden. They were given a field. At that time the church was following the readings from the Revised Common Lectionary through the book of Jeremiah. In the midst of the Babylonian siege, Jeremiah himself was imprisoned, national defeat was certain and hope was dim. But God told Jeremiah to buy a field at Anathoth. Jeremiah obeyed, but questioned God. The act of buying this field was a symbol of God’s commitment to eventually restore the land and normal life. Fred Bahnson, Anathoth’s garden manager, also tied the garden’s name to Jeremiah’s earlier command to the exiles to build gardens, settle down and seek shalom—peace. “Shalom doesn’t begin once every last person is convinced they need to get on board. It begins with a few people planting gardens in a land at war. It begins with a field.” [8]

R - ESTABLISH ROLES

“A single dedicated person giving a good example is better than a lot of wringing of hands and prophecies of doom.”[9] —Paul Brand

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” 1 Peter 4:10 (NAS)

The garden coordinator or champion is a key role in establishing and maintaining a community garden, but it is not the only one. In the New Testament, both Peter and Paul outline a variety of gifts that God gives to his people for the good of all. In the Old Testament, God gave Bezalel wisdom and knowledge in all kinds of craftsmanship for building the Tabernacle.[10] Solomon was not only an astute administrator but God had given him a breadth of mind that allowed him to write proverbs and songs, to give talks on trees, animals, birds, creeping things and fish.[11] This list can prompt ideas of how a wide variety of gifts or talents can find their place within a community garden. A garden shed may need to be constructed; or a song written to celebrate ground breaking. Perhaps there are individuals who are not using their expertise or passion in any other way within the church, but would bloom in a community garden. The garden is a doorway to experience God’s creation in a fresh way. Not only does it produce food for people, but the ebb and flow of seasons, the battle against pests and disease, the dependence on weather and the interaction between plants, insects and birds gives a picture of God’s continuous commitment to life in a fallen world. As Paul Brand said, an individual who uses their interest and ability in a joyful way, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, can make a major impact on the lives of others. One of the tasks of the garden committee or core support group is to make this happen by welcoming people, encouraging them to use their strengths within the scope of the garden project and finding roles for as many people as possible. This step is part of a commitment to both the process (changing people’s lives) and the product (production of food) of a community garden.

E – CELEBRATE WITH EVENTS

“Finally in the spring we organized a planting volunteer party which was amazing. We planted everything, built a split rail fence, built a small hoop house all in one day. The next day at church people arrived to see the garden – it was quite a dramatic change. That showed people that this was serious and that it would look good (aesthetically pleasing).” —Dave Timmer[12]

“In fact, I am concerned that this faith-based community garden movement may not be sustainable unless we learn how to connect our new found passions to our understanding of God and God’s world.”[13]
Christine Sine

Throughout scripture, God's people celebrated the seasons and events in their lives with feasts and joy. Having fun together will sustain and encourage your garden volunteers, both spiritually and psychologically. As Jim Flint said, one advantage of starting small is the opportunity to balance work with pleasure. Perhaps your calendar could include a pot-luck dinner in the spring with gardener orientation sessions, a planting party, weeding weekends. In the colder months have a harvest festival and a "Winter Soup - Put the Garden to Rest" party. In the depths of winter you could host a "Dream Garden, Seed Selection Dessert."

A community garden is also an opportunity for education and exploration. The living world is all around us, but often we need a guide to open our eyes. Signs could be staked to highlight the pollinator garden and the type of plants. Sunday school classes, boys and girls clubs or adult education may all find topics to address throughout the garden. Some specific ideas will be highlighted after the Encountering the Garden section. Some gardens offer classes in cooking, canning and preserving. Churches have even weighed the gardeners at the beginning of the season and at the end to see if the exercise of planting and weeding has helped them to become fit and healthy. Engaging people is the key – nourish them, help them to have fun and they will bloom as well.

Encountering Creation

In the busyness of recruiting people and organizing a community garden, it is easy to overlook the garden itself, to see it only as a means to an end. But the garden, with its plants, soil, water and creatures is a place full of wonder. Understanding the why as well as the how of gardening techniques enables the gardener to apply a "do with" rather than a "do for" approach to the garden as well as to his relationships with people. Gardening in a way that promotes biodiversity creates a garden ready to respond to its calling. Aiming for biodiversity is not a goal simply because biodiversity (or the wealth of different creatures) is declining in the world. Rather it is part of the work itself. It is asking the bigger or right questions such as: "How does God intend the world to work?" "How does He intend us to relate to what He has made?" "If all creation speaks of the wonder of God, how can we learn to open our eyes to see this right where we are?"

Gardening for biodiversity not only gives us the opportunity to love what God cares for, but to do it with wisdom. Including habitats for pollinators is wise because plants depend on them. Improving soil for the health of soil

organisms is wise because plants and our future depend on them. And we can learn much about life and relationships from gardening.

PLANTS

"Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."
Genesis 2:8-9 (NIV)

Plants are phototrophs, wondrous organism that eat light and fix carbon. They take light from the sun, carbon dioxide from the air, water and minerals from the soil and, in partnership with pollinators, produce something more—food that nourishes life for other creatures. They take what they find where they dwell and improve where they are. The best community gardens grow in the same way, rooted in the local issues and interests of the people they serve.

People are not the only ones with roles within a garden. Plants have tasks beyond the production of food. By enhancing these roles, plants become the gardener's partners in weed and pest control and by enriching the soil. For example, marigolds release a substance in the soil that repels nematodes (tiny microscopic worms), helping to protect vegetables such as pumpkins, eggplants, potatoes, tomatoes and squash. Collard greens act as a decoy luring destructive moths away from cabbages. Some plants grow well together strengthening each other in unseen ways. Tomatoes are good companions to asparagus, celery, parsley, carrots and onions, but not to potatoes or cabbages. Legumes, such as peas and beans, take nitrogen from the air and transfer or fix it to the soil, essentially making fertilizer.

Native Americans use beans, corn and squash to form a trio, the Three Sisters, to sustain life. They plant corn and beans on mounds with the squash on the lower ground in between. Corn provides support for the bean plants. The beans fertilize the soil. Squash leaves act as living mulch, shading the ground, conserving water, and preventing weed

growth. This type of gardening, known as inter-cropping, can reduce risks from disease and pests. A large field of one type of vegetable is much more vulnerable to an attack than the same field full of a wide variety of plants. A disease or pest won't spread as quickly if it encounters a mixture of plants.

Like people, each plant species has its own nutritional requirements, lifestyle and challenges. By rotating families of crops through areas of the garden, the plants themselves help to prevent disease, control pests, and fertilize the soil. One day you have a luxuriant zucchini. The next it has suffered sudden death. The culprit is often the squash vine borer. A small moth laid her eggs on the stems and leaves of your plant. The larvae hatched within a week and began devouring the plant's stem, killing the plant and dropping to the ground to hide out until next spring emerging then as "the moth". If they find squash planted near them they can begin the cycle again. In this way, pest populations increase in the soil. But if they find an entirely different family of plants, and do so for at least two years, they begin to die out.

A plant such as corn requires a lot of nitrogen. Planted in the same spot year after year, corn will deplete nitrogen from the soil. Beans and peas, however, return nitrogen to the soil. Alternating crops such as corn with beans or peas uses these plant's characteristics to heal their environment. Carrots venture deep into the soil, using nutrients that have been unavailable to shallow rooted crops and creating an aerated soil for the next resident. A good crop rotation can be as simple as dividing the garden plots into three or four sections. Separate your vegetable crops into families with similar nutrition needs, root styles or enemies. Rotate your families through the various sections in the garden, making sure they have two years away from any one location. Master Gardeners can help you plan a rotation for your specific location and proposed harvest.

In addition to producing food for us, plants store nutrients throughout their bodies. When the leaves or the plant dies, this energy would be lost without the work of tiny decomposers in the soil. Composting is a way of recapturing this energy, allowing these tiny creatures to fulfill their roles and making this energy and nutrients available to the next generation of plants.

Composting may be as basic as a designated spot for depositing plant waste. Keep the pile moist but not soggy and turn or stir it periodically to incorporate air. This provides for the needs of the decomposers and helps the mix to generate heat, killing diseases and weeds. Or the compost bin may be placed on a wire mesh elevated off the ground. The pile itself will draw in air. More elaborate composting bins are available making the whole process easy. Good compost balances key nutrients, carbon and nitrogen, with carbon contributing the greatest share. Carbon-rich materials tend to be dry and brown, for instance autumn leaves and straw. Nitrogen-rich materials are usually green and wet, such as fresh grass clipping and food waste. The compost is mature when it is dark and crumbly.[14] To many, compost is gardener's gold. It is definitely wise use of existing resources.

Each of these practices can be applied on allotment plots or within a food bank garden. Several of the books in the Resources section provide specifics on companion planting, intercropping, composting and other conservation garden techniques. Or visit www.attra.ncat.org. The place to start strengthening our plant partners is with the soil and its inhabitants.

SOIL

"You can have productive, fertile soil without knowing anything about the fine points of soil chemistry and mineral balancing, as long as you understand the importance of caring for the soil organisms."[15] *—Grace Gershuny*

A garden's soil is the stage of a great drama. The soil's role is to provide the structure and the raw materials where this drama can successfully unfold. The primary actors are the billions of tiny, often microscopic, organisms that are charged with gathering raw materials, minerals and nutrients, and converting them to a form that can be used by plant roots. These nutrients may be locked up in the bodies of living things, but the tiny decomposers release and reclaim them. Then the nutrients must be shipped to plant roots using water as the transport system. The organisms themselves require air to live, so most of the action takes place within the top several inches of soil. One report suggests that a single gram of soil "could contain 10,000 million individual cells comprising 4,000 to 5,000 bacterial types, of which less than 10 percent have been isolated and are known to science. That is before adding earthworms, snails, and other invertebrates."[16]

Elliot Coleman, who has farmed vegetables in Maine for over 30 years, believes that these organisms and other natural processes in the soil are the real gardening experts. Most modern agriculture relies on fertilizers, applying pre-digested nutrients directly to plant roots, not benefiting the soil or its organisms. But, says Coleman, "in fertile soil, the system can do a better job on its own. Therefore my responsibility as a farmer is to add to the system the ingredients necessary to support a fertile soil."[17]

Soil begins as hard rock, weathered and broken down over many years. Through these trials, soil becomes a giver of life. A soil's proportion of sand, silt and clay determines its ability to provide air spaces and hold water. Sandy soil has lots of space for air but water escapes quickly, carrying nutrients with it. Clay may be better at retaining water but can become hard-packed and heavy. How the soil was formed and the land used also affects the pH or acid/alkaline balance. Most soil organisms prosper with a pH of 6.3 to 6.8. Many soil minerals also dissolve more readily in water within this range, making them more accessible to plants. The final and dynamic portion of the soil is organic matter, the living organisms, plant rootsand decaying vegetation – the part that is or has been alive.

Start by understanding your own soil and begin to build its structure and fertility. The goal is light soil with lots of pores – able to hold water at the right tension next to plant roots, the rhizosphere, as well as allowing air to penetrate underground for soil organisms. Examine your soil to see the proportions of sand, silt and clay. Is the land waterlogged or hard-packed? Good soil structure is a key to productivity, but this structure is also influenced by the soil's biological activity. Earthworms not only help to aerate the soil but they excrete sticky substances that hold soil particles together. Lots of earthworms indicate healthy soil. Adding organic matter, such as compost can help to ameliorate some of the problems of both sandy and clay soils, as well as provide the food and raw materials for earthworms and other creatures. Strive to have organic matter constitute 25-30 percent

of the top 8 inches of soil. A good soil test will tell you the soil's pH, as well as the proportions of key minerals such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and calcium. Adding rock powders, such as limestone, rock phosphate and greensand will slowly release necessary minerals in a form soil organisms can readily use. The challenge and the opportunity of gardening is learning the characteristics of your particular soil, changing what you can and working around what you cannot.

Focusing on increasing the soil's biological activity will not only increase fertility and productivity over time, but will also influence the following decisions:

A. Tilling method. Deep tilling can destroy soil structure. While some tilling may be necessary to initially prepare soil and to tackle weeds, try to keep the organic matter within the top few inches of the surface. During the growing season, hoeing weeds can actually stimulate bacterial activity by introducing more air to the soil. Use rotary tillers carefully. Too much use can create hard-pans beneath the surface where the blades pound the soil. Avoid compacting the soil – walk on paths instead.

B. Keep the soil covered at all times. Intense temperature changes during the winter can kill organisms near the surface and introduce disease. Plant a cover crop, one that can nourish the soil and be turned under in the spring. Use an organic mulch to shade the soil, retain moisture and lesson weeds during the growing season. Almost any former plant product can be used as mulch – from shredded newspapers to shredded leaves. The mulch will also feed the soil as soil organisms break it down.

C. Fertilize sparingly and according to soil test results. Fertilizers feed the plants, not the soil. Unless you build the soil's fertility you will need to fertilize year after year. Not only is this an expense but also the build up of fertilizer residues can be deadly to the soil and its organisms. Excessive fertilizer use is one of the primary causes of algae blooms and dead spots in nearby waterways. Instead, seek to build soil fertility and the soil organisms will be responsible for creating healthy plants.

Finally, keep your soil on your property. Paul Brand grew up as a missionary child in India and later returned as a doctor. He tells the story of playing in the rice patties with a group of other small boys. An elderly gentleman stopped them and asked what they were doing. They thought he would reprimand them for trampling the rice patties, muddying the water and allowing water to escape over the terraces. Instead the elder said: "That mud flowing over the dam has given my family food since before I was born, and before my grandfather was born. It would have given my grandchildren and their grandchildren food forever. Now it will never feed us again. When you see mud in the channels of water, you know that life is flowing away from the mountains."[18] Soil supports life. Treat it well.

WATER

"The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)

To the garden, water brings life. Water is the medium where the transactions of life occur. It transports minerals from the soil to the plant's roots. Water provides strength to each of the plant's cells, enabling the entire organism to stand firm, to hold its shape and display its leaves to the sun. It disperses sugars produced by photosynthesis for storage throughout the plant. It escapes as water vapor through pores in the leaves, cooling the plant and acting as a pump to draw more water from the soil. This process, called transpiration, is part of the global water cycle, taking water from the earth and seas, releasing it to the air to eventually return again as rain. Plants make impressive contributions to this cycle. An acre of corn can transpire about 400,000 gallons of water in a growing season, enough to create an acre lake 15 inches deep.19 About ten percent of the water in the atmosphere is released through plant leaves, which is why it is often cooler and more pleasant in a garden. Yet water can also destroy. Too much can clog soil's air spaces and drain away minerals, reducing soil fertility, causing plants to become weak and unproductive, and fouling nearby waterways.

The gardener's goal is to use available water most effectively. Taking care of the soil is the first step in insuring that water provided by rain stays in

the garden. A good population of earthworms will create a web of tiny vertical channels throughout the upper portions of the soil, perfect pathways to carry water from the surface to the plant root zone and deeper. Mulch and no-till gardening techniques lesson the impact of raindrops and capture and store more water than bare soil, part of a drought protection and water conservation strategy. Lots of organic matter creates the right structure to hold nutrients and preserve air spaces. Rain barrels are also great ways to capture and reuse naturally provided water.

Plants gather water with their roots, not their leaves. About 70 percent of the water they use comes from the soil surrounding the top half of their roots.20 A healthy plant extends its roots deep underground, accessing water not seen from the surface. So, when and how do you add water? One way to decide is to dig a small hole 3 to 4 inches deep and feel the soil. If it is moist, wait on watering. The water content several inches into the soil is more important than the soil's surface appearance. Roots explore for water. Too frequent or shallow watering will cause them to remain near the surface making them vulnerable to heat and drought. It is better to water less frequently, but slowly and deeply. Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems do this effectively. Some gardeners bury gallon jugs, pierced full of tiny holes, in the ground near groups of plants. By periodically filling the jug, they enable the water to seep directly into the root zone. If hand watering, aim to soak a wide area around the base of the plant. Watering the leaves may cool the plant in hot weather but they need a deep drink from the soil to prosper.

Timing is also important for conserving water and protecting plants. The best time to water is in the cool of the day – preferably early morning. The heat of the afternoon can evaporate water before it can seep into the soil. Think of this as watering the air rather than the roots. Watering too late in the day can leave moisture on leaves, an invitation to disease. Plants also have a greater need for water during specific times in their growing season. Each variety has its own preference. In general, most plants require consistent water during germination or when transplanted. Shallow rooted crops, such as lettuce, need water for the entire growing season. For most others the critical time is during fruit production – from flowering to the creation of that perfect tomato. Good, timely, and effective watering can

not only enable you to produce a crop but also affects the taste. After all, most vegetables are about 90 percent water.

POLLINATORS

"If wild pollinators are going to work for agriculture, agriculture will also have to work for them."[21] *Lisa Jones*

Without the work of bees, butterflies or other pollinators, the plant would produce its flowers in vain. By itself, it cannot convert its offering of pollen into seeds or fruit. One in every three mouthfuls of the food or beverages we consume is available to us because of bees, butterflies, birds or bats.[22] These morsels are usually the most nutritious parts of our diet, our fruits and vegetables. Many other creatures also depend on the work of pollinators. For instance, picture a huge bear feasting on blackberries, which would not be there without the efforts of a tiny native bee pollinating the blossoms.

To many people, the honeybee is the prime pollinator, carrying golden pollen on its fuzzy hind legs from flower to flower. But in fact many of our native bees are much more efficient in pollinating our gardens. Tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers lock their pollen in place on the anther (flower part), only to be released if the flower is vibrated very quickly. This is just the right task for a bumblebee. Their body structure allows them to grab the flower with their mandibles (mouth parts) and vibrate their flight muscles so strongly that the flower releases its pollen. Honeybees are not able to do this. If your tomatoes or peppers produce flowers but no fruit, you may want to ask, "Where are the bumblebees?" Honeybees are also particular about when they work. They don't like to be out and about if the temperature is below 55º F, the day is cloudy or too windy. Our native bees are not so choosy. 23 We have approximately 4,000 native bee species across North America. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service, these quiet little creatures provide approximately $4.1 billion in service to American agriculture.24 Managed hives of honeybees contribute about $15 billion, but native bees are also busy at work on the wild lands, gardens and ecosystems beyond our farms.[25] Most do not sting, do not live in hives and do not produce honey. Instead they live solitary lives concentrating

on gathering pollen for their babies, and pollinating plants in the process.

Pollinators do not offer their skills for free. Plants provide the reward, either a good supply of pollen or a sip of nectar. Like individuals, different pollinators prefer different colors or styles of flowers. By accommodating their needs, a community garden can invite these wondrous creatures to become partners in the harvest.
They need the right food and a place to live and freedom from harm. To create a garden friendly to pollinators:

A. Designate a specific area as a pollinator garden, or disperse clusters of flowers throughout the garden space. Native bees and butterflies prefer native, non-hybrid flowers such as Asters, Black-eyed Susans, Bee Balm, Pentstemon, Daisies, Lavender, Snapdragons, Yarrow, Mint or Salvia.

B. Plant flowers in groups making it easier for pollinators to find. Plant a wide variety of colors and flower styles, trying to ensure that at least three different varieties are in bloom during each part of the growing season.

C. Leave some bare spaces within the garden. The majority of native bees are solitary ground nesters. Or build a bee house for Blue Mason Bees (Orchard Bees), gentle bees that do not sting but are great at pollination.[26]

D. Provide a source of water – a bird-bath or a drip bucket to create a small patch of mud, attractive to mason bees and butterflies.

E. Do not use pesticides, or if essential, spray fast-acting varieties at dusk when pollinators are not active.

Pollinators bring an added benefit to the garden. Children love butterflies and hummingbirds. This type of gardening also attracts other beneficial insects, which can be your warriors against harmful pests. And birds will add music. For more information on pollinators see the Xerces Society Website: www.xerces.org.

WEEDS AND OTHER INTRUDERS

"Weeds are any plants that insist on growing where you don't want them to grow."[27] *—Barbara Pleasant*

Every garden will have weeds because a weed's job is to take over bare ground and prepare it for the future, perhaps as a field or a forest. They are hardy pioneers. Some, such as dandelions are good to eat. But in a garden, weeds compete with vegetables for nutrients and water. As pioneers, weeds produce lots of seeds that can survive a long time in the soil. Given the opportunity, such as a turn of soil and exposure to the sun, the weed seeds will sprout, often faster than garden vegetables.

The most important time for weeding is late spring to early summer, the month when vegetable seeds are sprouting. As the vegetables plants mature they can more easily compete with a few weeds; but in the beginning, weeds can overwhelm them. Pull young weeds when the soil is wet. Use a hoe or cultivator to chop the weed roots just below the surface when the earth is dry. Get them before they begin to set seeds. If you are using vegetable transplants, or when the vegetable seedlings grow tall enough, cover the bare ground with mulch, smothering weeds. Lay the unearthed weeds out to dry. Some weed seeds have been known to survive even the heat ofcomposting unless completely dried out before adding to the bin. Weed often. This can be a great time to get to know your crops and your fellow gardeners.

Pests and disease can also invade a garden. There are various strategies depending on the culprit. A pest cannot bother a plant it cannot reach. A floating row cover is a length of fine netting stretched over a frame. These covers can protect lettuce from aphids or summer squash from the squash vine borer moth. When the squash begins to flower the plant may be strong enough to fight off the borer on its own. The cover can be removed to let the bees and other pollinators in. Master Gardeners can be helpful for other strategies specific to your garden.

When Elliot Coleman began a vegetable farm in Maine three decades ago, he made a commitment to create ideal growing conditions for each crop.

He found that he did not need to use pesticides once he had succeeded in creating this ideal growing situation. He says:"…in no case does the creation of those ideal conditions require more than the minimal resources of a small farm, nor more than a reasonable understanding of soil science and agronomic principles. What it does require, however, is a thought pattern that approaches the problem from a plant-positive rather than a pest-negative point of view – from a desire to correct the cause rather than just treat the symptom."[28]

Jim Flint's guide to a sustainable community garden also provides the steps in developing this plant-positive thought pattern. Learn to know your Audience – the plants, soils and creatures that live in your garden. Start Small so you can understand the systems that need to work together to produce a crop. Plan to use your resources well including a compost bin, crop rotation and pollinator garden. Create an organic Identity. Put the various Roles of plants and garden organisms to work. And in the garden the E is for Education.

Education

"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 out Creator."[29] *—Christine Sine*

The garden is a delightful place to explore answers to the question: "How does God intend the world to work?" Consider the 'redemption' of the soil. From hardship - the grinding and erosion of hard rock over time - comes the potential structure that gives life. Dirt is not just full of 'icky' things, but rather tiny creatures with a task to do. Plants not only produce food but they also have roles that can range from soil doctors to pest warriors. The garden provides the opportunity to discover how the natural systems work together in a concrete, practical way. Children can learn that not only is there a global water cycle but it is a marvelous pumping system that happens right in their vegetable plot. They can be part of keeping the system moving by how they water their garden. Your church may have experts in bugs or butterflies who could open children's eyes to the beauty and intricacy of God's creation. Recruit some of your teachers to use your garden as an outdoor classroom to reveal how God designed creation to work. Search out examples of God's wisdom in the garden. (See Proverbs 8:22-31 for wisdom's part in creation)

"Then I (wisdom) was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, Rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men." Proverbs 8:30-31 (NASB)

The garden also brings some of the difficult challenges the world faces close to our lives and asks, "How does He intend us to relate to what He has made?" Each item in the life cycle of a garden is a doorway into thorny problems. A garden may have been started to alleviate a human crisis such as lack of healthy food, or the deterioration of an inner city neighborhood. Other concerns might have been the connection between how far food has to travel, energy use and climate change or the impacts of genetically engineered food and pesticides on human health. As the process unfolds and the gardeners seek to address the needs of plants they may begin to discover the challenges presented by modern intensive agriculture, such as the corruption of soil and devastation of waterways by excessive and indiscriminate use of fertilizer or pesticides. Some rural communities can no longer use individual wells for fresh water because of agricultural runoff seeping into groundwater. At the same time, many of these communities may depend economically on this type of agriculture. Gardeners may begin to ask if there is a way to feed ourselves and the world without creating harm to ourselves, our soil, waterways and other creatures. The decline of species is as close as the bees or butterflies that do or do not enter our garden. This brings us full circle.
As Rich Dixon says:

"Depending on the source, approximately 40 to 50 percent of native pollinators have been lost in the past 100 years. Habitat loss, pollution, pesticides and being out competed by non-native species are some of the key factors in this decline. Approximately 80 percent of what is consumed each day requires at least a portion of its ingredients to be pollinated before it becomes a food source. When pollinator habitats decline, even temporarily, produce production lowers. When produce production lowers, its cost increases, making it much harder for lower income families and feeding programs to be granted fresh, healthy food."[30]

A church might want to explore some of these challenges more deeply and discern if there is a part they should play in seeking a solution. A good model is to begin to gather the facts. What are the legal, scientific, or economic realities involved? Are there viable technical alternatives? How does this affect people psychologically? Are particular social groups affected and why? Is there any wisdom available from history? What are possible solutions? What harm would be caused or alleviated by that solution?

Often these challenges become defined as "issues" divorced from the reality of human lives. In this case, they can become very divisive. People take sides and no real progress is made. A church has a great advantage. They may have members who are concerned with all sides: farmers who are striving to raise economically viable crops, members with a passion for care of creation, even some who are attempting to combine both. The church also has a wealth of teaching on the moral aspects of life and the example given by the character of God. How are we to relate to each other, to those who disagree with our views, to all that God loves and cares for? A church can root all of this in an investment in their community by taking these concerns from the abstract and apply Jeremiah's admonition to "seek the peace and prosperity" of where they have been placed. In the process they may be able to encounter the answer to the third question: "If all creation proclaims the glory of God, how can we begin to see and experience this right where we are?" Many of these large challenges, if looked at too closely, can produce sadness. Most are the result of human choices. And they seem so huge. But we are to be people of hope, bringing the wisdom and insight God gives us to help others and ourselves learn to live as a gift to the world around us. Peter Harris said:

"I don't think there is any guarantee we will save the planet. I don't think the Bible gives us much reassurance about that. But I do believe it gives God tremendous pleasure when his people do what they were created to do, which is care for what he made."[31]

A Final Word

We began with a church on a quest to make a difference in their community. The challenge of previous generations has been war, the atom bomb, disease or regional environmental issues such as drought and the dust bowl. Today, scientists are concerned about the health of the earth's entire background support system. The next generation sees these issues as critical to their future. Pastors desire to help their congregants become more than just consumers. Individuals wonder if their lives have significance. While a church cannot solve all of these concerns, they can understand the times like the men of Issacar so long ago.[32] They can plan a strategy to make the gospel real where they live. A community garden may be a small step – a tiny response in a particular area – but it can be a potent one.

The word 'winsome' captures a great vision for a community garden. Throughout history this word has included the idea of loving or caring for others, finding or being a pleasure and a joy, the attractiveness of a life as opposed to words, striving and winning. The goals of a community garden, whether concerned with providing for people or creating a fruitful

garden, are worth striving for. Will you have the courage to be yourself and trust that God will be winsome and attractive through you? The Apostle Paul, in his letters to the Corinthians and Philippians, was convinced that it was God who was at work within them, even with all their quarrelsomness and imperfections.

Amy Lee sums up the human impact of a church based garden:

"By allotting land for a community garden, a church is saying, We care about the community, the planet (by growing food locally, we contribute in a very real way to decrease in fossil fuel use), and providing a source for personal enrichment on a spiritual (witnessing to the community about God's love while working side by side), physical (physical fitness and healthy eating are natural results of participation) and emotional level (the garden provides a unique social network of like-minded people)." [33]

We can also reclaim our land, use it wisely and transform it. Paul Brand gave the following example from his life in India, not a community garden, but perhaps a greater challenge. The land donated for the Schieffelin Research and Training Center (for leprosy patients) was barren, treeless, full of gravel and without accessible water. But Dr. Ernest Fritschi, the director, believed he could make a difference. Each year he planted a tree. He nurtured seedlings, planting them when they would be watered by rain. He worked with the land, contouring the gravel to slow runoff to allow the water to soak in. The barren landscape became a sanctuary, full of birds and trees. Soil was being built and not lost.

"One man can make a difference. Dedication is what is needed. And faith. It is important, too, because the man who made this little revolution is not a professional farmer, or a government official. He is a doctor who loves trees, soil and water."[34]

Appendix

Release of All Claims

I,_____, am a participant in the Community Garden. As a condition of being allowed to participate in the Community Garden, I agree to the following:

1. I am duly aware of the risks and hazards that may arise through participation in the Community Garden, and assume any expenses and liabilities I incur in the event of an accident, illness or other incapacity. If I have had any questions about the Community Garden, its nature, risks or hazards, I have contacted the garden coordinator and discussed those questions with him or her to my satisfaction.

2. In consideration of being granted the opportunity to participate in the Community Garden, I, for myself, my executors, administrators, agents and assigns do hereby release and forever discharge the Garden Committee, Garden Coordinator, volunteers, other gardeners, and the cooperating landowner from all claims of damages, demands, and any actions whatsoever, including those based on negligence, in any manner arising out of my participation in this activity. I understand that this Release means that, among other things, I am giving up my right to sue for any such losses, damages, injury or costs that I may incur.

I have read this entire Release, fully understand it, and I agree to be legally bound by it.

Participant's Signature _____

Printed Name_____ Date_____

Permission for Land Use

I,_____ give permission to
(property owner's name)

_____ to use the property located at
(community garden project)

_____ as a community gardening project, for the
(site's street address)

term of____ years beginning_____ and ending _____.
(start date) (ending date)

This agreement may be renewed with the approval of both the property owner and the community garden organization at the end of the agreement period. All questions about the community garden, its nature, risks or hazards, have been discussed with the garden coordinator to my satisfaction.

The community garden agrees to indemnify and save harmless the property owner from all damages and claims arising out of any act, omission or neglect by the community garden, and from any and all actions or causes of action arising from the community garden's occupation or use of the property.

As the property owner, I agree to notify the community gardening organization of any change in land ownership, development, or use 60 days prior to the change in status.

Property owner's signature_____

Date_____

Garden Plot Registration

Name_____ Date _____

Address _____

Phone (home)_____ (work)_____

Email address:_____

What is your gardening experience level?
Expert_____Know what I'm doing_____Have grown a few things_____Never touched a shovel_____

Do you want to help with leadership/organization?
Yes_____No_____

A plot fee of ____ is required before the plot can be assigned. This fee will go toward expenses of the community garden (water bills, plant/seed purchases, community tools, etc.).

Do you want financial assistance with seeds, starts, fertilizer, and/or membership fee?
Yes_____No_____

Please mark three areas that you would be interested in volunteering with during the season. Each gardener is expected to help during the season with general chores.

___Site maintenance
___Phone calls
___Harvest distribution
___Organization
___Path maintenance
___Construction projects
___Watering
___Fall cleanup
___Composting
___Social events

I have read the Community Garden Rules and understand that failure to meet the guidelines will result in loss of gardening privileges.

Signature_____Date _____

General Guidelines

Neighbor, city, fellow gardener relationships are key. This is your garden…it is up to you to keep it looking nice, make it an enjoyable place to be, and help it to provide healthy produce for yourselves and your families.

1) There is no plot fee – this year only 10ft x 10ft plots are available (perhaps will have the room to have larger plots in future years)

2) A small amount of financial assistance is available for purchasing seeds, starts, supplies. Some tools can be provided or you can bring your own.

3) Plot assignments are to be made prior to planting (before June 12).

4) Gardeners are ultimately responsible for their own plot. You are responsible for watering, weeding, staking, fertilizing your own plot. Assigned plots must be used throughout the gardening season (April – November). They can be used during off-season if appropriate.

5) Each gardener should be considerate of other's plots. Don't shade others (be mindful of where you plant sunflowers, etc. Don't harvest other's produce. Don't add anything to or take anything from other's plots.

6) The plot should be maintained neatly; no litter in the garden, weeds should be kept to a minimum and keep things organic.

7) Neglected plots will be reassigned or revert to a communal garden space.

8) Final seasonal clean-up should occur before Nov 28. (Take down fences, personal property, compost plant debris.)

9) Please keep pets out of the garden area, children are welcome but please supervise them.

10) Don't build any permanent structures. Temporary fences, pathways, etc., are OK.

11) Keep your eyes out for vandalism, inappropriate use of the garden.

12) The landowner of xxx, xxx, the Community Garden and its organizers are not responsible for any damage, theft, injury that may happen while onsite.

Resources

Websites: ATTRA - the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service. www.attra.ncat.org. Website loaded with information on organic and sustainable farming, but applicable to a community garden.

American Community Gardening Association: Practical guidance on the human aspects of starting a community garden. http://www.communitygarden.org.

University of Missouri: Community Gardening Toolkit by Bill McKelvey http://missouri.edu/publications/displaypub.aspx?P=mp906. An excellent resource for planning and starting a community garden. Includes sample garden budget, gardener applications, guidelines and sample lease.

Friends of Burlington Gardens: www.burlingtongardens.org. Provides excellent information on fundraising, tasks needed to create sustainability, and starting community gardens.

Selecting and Using a Soil Testing Laboratory. Published by the Maryland Cooperative Extension Service. www.hgic.umd.edu/documents/selectingsoiltestlabandsoiltestchart.pdf

Books

Sustainable Living:

Duncan Clark & Richie Unterberger. *The Rough Guide to Shopping with a Conscience,* (Rough Guides, 2007). Provides in-depth discussions on consumption, from food, lifestyle, sustainability, environment, etc.

Robert White, Nick Spencer and Virginia Vroblesky. *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, (Hendrickson Publishing, 2009). Practically explores the connection between faith, sustainability and climate change.

Faith and Care of Creation:

Brown, Ed. *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*. (IVP Books, 2008). Examines the Biblical foundations for a Christian's care of creation, providing practical steps for individuals and organizations. Includes ideas on missions.

Harris, Peter. *Kingfisher's Fire: A story of hope for God's earth*. (Monarch Books, 2008). The story of a Christian conservation organization's growth from a small center in Portugal to projects in 18 countries around the world. The chapter on the United States illustrates the cultural challenges confronting American Christians as they try to put a belief in creation care into practice.

Lowe, Ben. *Green Revolution: Coming Together to Care for Creation*. (IVP Books, 2009). Using stories of community organizing on college campuses, Ben Lowe challenges this generation to demonstrate what Christian-care of creation would look like.

Robinson, Tri. *Saving God's Green Earth*. (Ampelon Publishing, 2006). A pastor and a church transform their belief in care of creation into practical action that affects their community.

Van Dyke, Fred, David Mahan, Joseph Sheldon, Raymond Brand. *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship*. (IVP Books,1996). Written by four biologists,

Redeeming Creation examines issues such as the role of God as creator, the value of creation, the consequences of our actions, the Christian response of restoration and redemption, and ecology and the Christian mind. Though a decade old, this book is still relevant and widely used.

Pollinators and Gardening: There are loads of good gardening books. The following are particularly worth exploring:

Bachmann, Stephen L. and Gary Paul Nabhan. *The Forgotten Pollinators*, (Island Press, 1997). A wonderful guide to bees and other pollinators.

Coleman, Eliot. *The New Organic Grower*, (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company. 1995). Lessons learned from 30 years of organic farming. Easy to read and applicable to small gardens or farms.

Gershuny, Grace. *Start with the Soil*, (Emmaus, Pa: Rodale Press, 1993). Everything you need to know to nurture healthy garden soil.

Lanza, Patricia. *Lasagna Gardening*, (Emmaus, Pa. Rodale Press, 1998). How to grow plants without tilling the soil. Includes ideas for Bird and Butterfly gardens.

Lawson, Laura J. *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening In America*, (University of California Press 2005). Explores the challenges and opportunities of urban community gardens over the past century.

Maden, Eric, Matthew Shepherd, Marce Vaughan, Scott Black. *Attracting Native Pollinators*, Xerces Society. (North Adam, Mass., Storey Publishing, 2011). New book on pollinators from the experts at the Xerces Society. see www.xerces.org.

Miller, Crow and Elizabeth Crow. *Organic Gardening, A Comprehensive Guide to Chemical-Free Growing*, (Foster City, Ca. IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000). Good information on growing individual vegetables.

Sine, Christine. *To Garden With God*, (Mustard Seed Associates, 2009). Learning to garden and experience God throughout each season of the year. Order from Mustard Seed Associates www.msainfo.org or 206-524-2112.

Endnotes

1 Jim Flint, e-mail message to author, September 7, 2010.
2 Jim Flint, "Keys to Success: how to develop a sustainable school, youth, or community-based garden project," Friends of Burlington Gardens, http://www.burlingtongardens.org (accessed 2010)
3 Jared Wright. "Tulsa Church's Community Garden = New Outreach Model" The Spectrum – *Community Through Conversation*. 14 May, 2009 www.spectrummagazine.org.
4 Peter Harris, email message to author, January 2011.
5 Flint, "Keys to Success".
6 Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004) xv
7 Dave Timmer, email to author 8/17/2010.
8 Fred Bahnson, "A Garden Becomes a Protest. The Field at Anathoth," *Orion Magazine*. July/August 2007, available online at http://www.orionmagazine.org.
9 Paul Brand, "A Handful of Mud. Soil is life. Can we preserve it for future generations," *Christianity Today*.

2003, available online at http:// www.christianitytoday.com .
10 Exodus 31:2-5.
11 I Kings 4: 29-33.
12 Timmer, 8/17/2010.
13 Christine Sine, “Creating a Faith Based Community Garden” Sustainable Traditions, http://sustainable-traditons.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden. 4/22/2010. (accesssed 8/25/2010). http://sustainabletraditions.com.
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15 Grace Gershuny, *Start With the Soil* (Emmaus, Pa: Rodale Press, 1993) 27.
16 Duncan Clark & Richie Unterberger, “The Wonders of Soil,*”The Rough Guide to Shopping with a Conscience* (New York: Rough Guides, 2007) 76.
17 Elliot Coleman, *The New Organic Grower* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1995) 97.
18 Brand, “A Handful of Mud”.
19 John W. Kimball, “Transpiration,” in *Biology Pages* by John W. Kimball. http://Biology-pages.info. (accessed May 2011).
20 Mike Morris, “Soil Moisture Monitoring: Low-Cost Tools and Methods” National Sustainable Agriculture Service. http://www.attra.ncat.org 2006, p.3. (accessed May 2011).
21 Lisa Jones, “Native Hum,” *High Country News* available online at http://www.hcn.org.
22 Eric Mader, Assistant Pollinator Program Director. Xerces Society, communication with author, January 11, 2010. www.xerces.org.
23 Eric Mader, Marla Spivak and Elaine Evans, *Managing Alternative pollinators: A Handbook for Beekeepers, Growers and Conservationists, SARE Handbook 11, 2010*. available at http:// www.nraes.org. 2.
24 Natural Resources Conservation Service, “Nectar Corridors.” Plant Management EPL 41. Natural Resourcs Conservation Service, http://www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov (accessed May 2011).
25 Lisa Jones. “Native Hum”.
26 The Xerces Society, “Nests for Native Bees,” Xerces Society, http://www.xerces.org (accessed May 2011).
27 Barbara Pleasant, *The Gardener’s Weed Book: Earth Safe Controls* (Storey Publishing, LLC, 1996) 1.
28 Elliot Coleman, *The New Organic Grower*. p 181.
29 Christine Sine. “Creating a Faith Based Community Garden” .
30 Rich Dixon. Email message to author, September 2, 2010.
31 Andy Crouch, “The Joyful Environmentalists”, *Christianity Today*. June 2011.
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33 Wright. “Tulsa Church’s Community Garden”.
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