



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#205 - January 1, 2024

A Best Practice: Gardening as a Spiritual Practice

The **GEMS** issues of #86-88 reflected on gardening. Is it a spiritual practice? Can preparing the soil and planting the seeds teach us and form us? Can caring for the garden root us in faith/spirituality and call us to be concerned for others and the world?

Since the publication of those issues, many additional insights and experiences have been shared by many people from various areas. This issue features a parish which began a garden ministry to continue to respond to their call to be the Body of Christ in their area: to meet the need for healthy food for people in need.

How did it begin?

In 2022 there was a county-wide listening process in Mahoning County (Ohio). The process was led by Catholic Charities for all the churches in the county. One of the most pressing needs discovered in the listening process was food insecurity. Many families in the county struggle to access healthy food for their daily meals.



The leadership of St. Joseph Parish, Youngstown, realized that they are blessed with an abundance of tillable land. The pastor, Fr. Fedor, and the study team recognized that they could devote some of their land to food production to help address the needs of these struggling families.

Thus, that became the purpose of St. Joseph Garden Ministry: the development of nearly a 5,000 square foot produce garden on the front lawn of the church to help feed hungry families in Mahoning County.

How does it work?

With the help of some master gardeners, the St. Joseph Garden Ministry team developed a garden plan and organized a group of parishioners to prepare the soil and plant the garden. Generous parishioners donated funds to pay for the seeds, plants, and other items that were needed to get started. Future plans of the Garden Ministry include a fence and compost bins.

There are numerous ways parishioners can become involved in the project.

Garden workdays are promoted through emails, on Facebook, and on Instagram.



The garden is a pattern of raised beds and worn paths. All parishioners of all ages are encouraged to walk on the paths of the garden as often as they would like. This foot traffic helps keep the weeds down in the paths.

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

Inspired by the Catholic Social Teaching theme of “Caring for God’s Creation the Garden Ministry is growing vegetables, berries, and herbs without the use of chemical pesticides. This, of course, is safer for the soil and for those who eat the produce.



The Fruits of their Labor

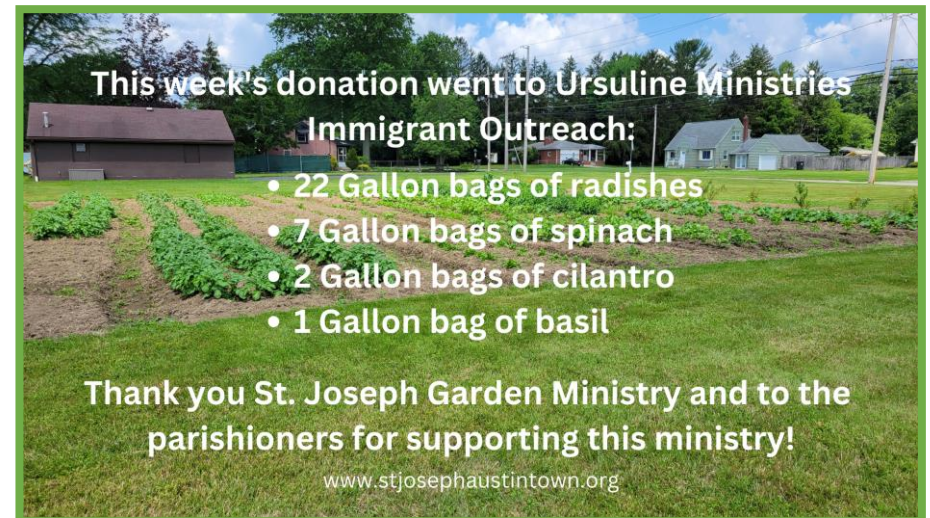
St. Joseph Garden Ministry currently distributes the produce through organizations that have as their mission to provide food for families in need. The first two organizations the parish is working with are:

- Ursuline Ministries Immigrant Outreach that does a weekly food distribution
- Immaculate Heart of Mary Food Pantry that does a monthly food distribution. (Immaculate Heart of Mary is the sister parish of St. Joseph.)

In July 2022 (with the garden only a little more than one month old), they had their first harvest day. This first picking produced:

- 22 gallon bags of radishes
- 7 gallon bags of spinach
- 2 gallon bags of cilantro
- 1 gallon bag of basil

All of this first harvest was donated to a ministry of the Ursuline Sisters that provides services to immigrants.



The following infographic has been shared with the parish, summarizing the Why? What? For Whom? And “Your Opportunity” of the Garden Ministry:

GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

St. Joseph Vegetable Garden
www.stjosephaustintown.org

1. Why? → **Our Gifts Meet Their Need**
A 2022 study revealed food insecurity in Mahoning County. We have tillable land. They need healthy food.

Organic Produce ← **2. What?**
Inspired by the Catholic commitment to care for God's creation, we are growing vegetables, berries, and herbs without the use of chemical pesticides. Poor families rarely get access to organic, fresh produce. We want to change that!



3. For Whom? → **Organizations that Help**
We are delivering, free of charge, all of our harvest to organizations that feed families in need in Mahoning County. Our first delivery went to Ursuline Ministries Immigrant Outreach. We look forward to sharing with our own IHM Food Pantry and others.



You Can Help! ← **4. Your Opportunity**
You're welcome to join the gardening team, even if you can't garden. We're a group of learners!
Learn more on our website.



Please take a walk through the garden once in a while. Walk the paths with a friend or a child. Your footsteps will help keep the paths weed-free. Pray or meditate in this very alive setting while you walk. God in nature can be a soothing remedy for our stressful lives. Please stay on the sunken paths and off the raised beds. Enjoy the beauty!

Another Important Fruit of the Garden Ministry

Jim Merhaut, a team member of the Garden Ministry, also reflects and invites parishioners:

“The garden is also a spiritual opportunity. Walking the paths of the garden can be a meditative experience. Being aware that you are in the midst of a diverse and abundant living environment can offer unique insights into the life of God among us. We invite everyone to use the garden as an opportunity for spiritual practice whether you are tending the crops or just strolling the paths.”



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com
jschaeffler@adriandominicans.org

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

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

- *Deepening Faith: Adult Faith Formation in the Parish*
<https://www.litpress.org/Products/4652/Deepening-Faith>
- Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/>
- Lifelong Faith: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>
- Lifelong Faith Studio: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com/>
- Seasons of Adult Faith website: <https://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com>
- The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation:
 - <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/books.html>
 - https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf