



About our Garden Ministry

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter, in which we strive to keep you informed about garden happenings at St. Gabriel's and offer "thought-seeds"—for reflection, inspiration and edification. We hope that once a quarter you will spend some time with the newsletter, getting to know St. Gabriel's Garden, its inhabitants and the people who tend it.

The pandemic doesn't allow us to get a picture of the team, but from this photo, taken in the fall of 2019 when we said goodbye to Marlene (holding flowers), we can introduce you to most of the members. (Marlene remains a member of the Garden Ministry, editing this newsletter, and providing other service from Kelowna, British Columbia.) In the back row, from the left, is Cameron Couchman, On-site Manager for the installation of the gardens, Fr. Steve Dunn, who attended Marlene's send-off, and Peter Zuech. In the front row, from the left, is Joe Ciulla, Marie Zuzek, Marlene Bourdon-King, Heather Bennett, Pat Ahlberg, Murray Mok and Neal Ahlberg. Missing from the photo are Bridget Barron, Caroline Liggayu-Martin, Fiona Rebelo, Kevin Benoit and Mary Jacobs.

With the aim of facilitating an encounter with the natural world of St. Gabriel's Garden and deepening one's relationship with nature, the Garden Ministry has developed two reflective garden walks: one is faith-based, with scriptural references, and the other is a sensory walk, that invites you to find yourself in the garden. Our plan is to have guides for the two walks available by June and accessible on your phone from the Garden Ministry page on the parish website, as well as in print form from a receptacle in the garden.



In addition, the guide for the walk of the Stations of the Cosmic Earth is being updated to facilitate reflection, by personalizing the experience of each station and/or anchoring the station in the specific locale of St. Gabe's Garden. This updated guide is also planned for June, and will likewise be available from the Garden Ministry page on the parish website and from a receptacle in the garden.

Spotlight on the Garden



In early March, we took advantage of the garden being blanketed in snow and the trees and shrubs dormant, to prune the fruit trees and shrubs, the smoke bush and the yews. The late winter was also spent securing a seed donor and acquiring soil elements and seed trays for the indoor planting of the community garden. William Dam Seeds, a family-based company in Dundas, Ontario, has generously agreed to provide seeds for our community garden.

Looking forward for the next quarter, indoor planting for the community garden will take place the weekend of March 27, early outdoor planting of cold crops such as radish and spinach is planned for early-to-mid April, and the main outdoor planting will follow on the long weekend in May. As the trees around the community garden continue to grow, the competition for sunlight has us once again moving the four original Square Foot boxes to a sunnier location, south of the concrete gathering circle. The cleared area in the south garden will be planted with a cover crop of red clover to loosen and enrich the soil in preparation for development in 2022 and the areas of the south garden currently under landscape fabric will be planted with white clover.

Spotlight on the Grape Hyacinth

Members of the Youth Group planted this perennial flower two years ago, in front of the yew shrubs at the north end of the parking lot. Definite signals of spring, their beautiful little spikes are well-named, looking like a hybrid between a bunch of miniature bright blue grapes and the much larger, later-blooming hyacinth. Growing 6 to 8 inches high, they brighten a garden near the soil, being among the first of the bulb-type flowers to bloom. Their foliage is bright green and grass-like, sometimes with a lighter stripe down the middle, so they are attractive before and after blooming. Easy to care for, they are perfect for rock gardens and ground cover, spread easily and are best planted in groups.



Muscari armeniacum

MARCH

27 - Indoor planting -
community garden

APRIL

3 - Sow clover crops
24 - Move community garden boxes

MAY

22 - Outdoor planting -
community garden

There is no plant in the ground but tells of your beauty,
O Christ.

There is no life in the sea but proclaims your goodness.

There is no bird on the wing,

there is no star in the sky,

there is nothing beneath the sun but is full of your blessing.

Lighten my understanding of your presence all around,
O Christ.

Kindle my will to be caring for Creation.

- **J. Phillip Newell**

*St. Gabriel's Garden, together with St. Gabriel's Church address the vision of Fr. Thomas Berry and his community of Passionists of a mutually enhancing relationship with the Earth.
The Passionists are celebrating their 300th anniversary this year.*

Living in Harmony with Creation

Volume 1, Q1, March, 2021

It seems incredible that we are beginning our fifth year of reclamation of the St. Gabriel's Garden. The architecture of the new church emphasizes the connection between the liturgical and natural sacred spaces, through the grand vista of the south-facing window. But that natural space, left untended over several years, turned into what became dubbed "The Garden of Weeden". Despite sporadic efforts to deal with it or do something productive, we had but limited or short-lived success.

A substantial initiative was clearly required, and on the recommendation of the architect Roberto Chiotti and Father Steve Dunn, with the support of the Parish Building Committee and the pastor, Father Brando, a permaculture professional, Robert Cordy, was hired, and a three-year plan undertaken to transform the north and south gardens. The seeds of change had also taken root in the dreams of several members of the parish community, and under the leadership of Heather Bennett, the Garden Ministry was born. The task before us was daunting...there was SO much to be done!



But working together, the change began. While cover crops of clover and rye were sown over most of the south garden space to amend the soil and suppress weeds, the smaller north garden was more quickly transformed with Hugelkultur gardening (using felled dead trees and

other natural refuse to feed the soil beds). Fruit-bearing trees and bushes were planted, as well as native medicinal plants and herbs.

Inspired by other community garden efforts in Toronto, and acting for the parish, the Garden Ministry then realized our dream to grow food. We partnered with the Good Shepherd Ministries, providing fresh produce for their chefs to use in nourishing the homeless. The first efforts, four square boxes "nesting" in the patio space, grew to nine boxes the subsequent year. Trial-and-error taught our gardeners which crops were most successful, and how to improve our results in future.

The whole venture has definitely borne fruit...both literally and figuratively. Parishioners with home gardens were given the opportunity to share plants with the Garden Ministry, to fill existing as well as newly created garden spaces. The response was generous, both in donations, and appreciation for the outcome.

But in terms of "living in harmony with creation", the exercise has had, and will continue to have, a profound spiritual impact. The transformation of the garden space shows what time, dedication and perseverance can accomplish, not only in nature, but also in our personal spiritual journeys. We are an impatient people...in this era of instant everything, we forget that perception of time is relative. Gardeners know that their efforts have differing rates of return...some crops are quick and easy. Some plantings take years to bear fruit. Some will not reach maturity until long after those who planted them are gone from this earth. Our spiritual journeys traverse our entire lives, with varying "harvests" along the way.

Our dream for the St. Gabriel's Garden is one that stretches far into the future, one that we build upon, season by season, year after year. It actually mirrors our spiritual dreams...we grow and learn by trial-and-error. But we know that our spiritual growth also has seasons, and living in harmony with creation fosters so many of the virtues we need for our souls' transformation: patience, prayerful reflection, peaceful contemplation, and gratitude for all of God's gifts to us, particularly the beauty and bounty of the natural world.

As we experience the spring equinox, marking the halfway point in the northern hemisphere's tilt towards the sun, it is fitting to focus on the transformation that is upon us. The promise of spring aligns with the reality of the Resurrection. Just as Jesus fulfilled His promise, conquering sin and rising from the dead, plant and animal life "resurrects" from the death and dormancy of winter. It is an apt metaphor, to be reminded that we, too, can be transformed.

Marlene Bourdon-King
Editor: St. Gabriel's Growing News