



ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN GROWING NEWS

About Our Garden Ministry

2021 has been bountiful for the Garden Ministry. We have been blessed with 3 new members and 3 associates, swelling our ranks to 18 dedicated participants. Our newest member, Emma Rudolph, is a recent graduate in Botany. This year also marks the Garden Ministry's fifth year of service and the fifteenth anniversary of the church's dedication. Initially, our vision was to protect and care for the revitalized garden, installed between 2017 and 2019, but as our relationship with the land grew and deepened spiritually, it called us to invite others to share the experience of "homecoming" that can be found when we open ourselves to the natural world. As a result, two reflective walk guides (a third on the way) and a garden retreat, "The Garden: Gateway to Earth Spirituality," were developed and offered this year.

In 2022, our care for the garden will continue, along with offering opportunities for parishioners and the larger community to engage with the land. In addition, we hope that 2022 will allow us to revive community involvement to pre-pandemic levels in events including indoor and outdoor plantings and harvest celebrations.

Your interest and encouragement fire our imagination, our spirit and our commitment to service. Thank you!

Spotlight on the Garden

"The glory of gardening: Hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul." Alfred Austin could have been describing the experience of the participants in our parish's first garden retreat: Gateway to Earth Spirituality. The day offered the opportunity to deepen our relationship with the land, through a combination of learning, facilitated by speakers, reflection and hands-on encounters with the garden. Fr. Stephen Dunn, in an interactive session, invited us to change our perspective; Roberto Chiotti demonstrated how the architecture of St. Gabriel's church addresses our relationship to Sun and the whole Earth community, and Maria Montejo spoke of the relationship of indigenous peoples to the land.

On that day, brilliant sunshine kissed every plant and creature in the garden; warming breezes drew plants and people together in a variety of garden

care activities, grasses whispered, birds warbled and squirrels scampered. We humans relaxed, chatted and laughed together, happy to be "Hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature."



Roberto Chiotti

Spotlight on Witch Hazel

Hamamelis virginiana

The name of this extraordinary shrub is thought to have originated in the practice of water dowsing among the early settlers. They noticed that the plant's preferred location in sunny but damp woods and along stream banks suggested it might be useful in "divining" water sources. Holding a forked branch, they would walk slowly with the tip pointing to the earth. Where the rod bent downwards, they would dig for water. The term "witch," used in this context, may hail from the early Anglo-Saxon word "wicke" meaning "bend." On the other hand, the term may have derived from the notion of divination as a form of witchery. "Hazel" acknowledges the similarity of the witch hazel leaf to the leaf of the hazel nut tree.



The medicinal properties of witch hazel were first taught to the settlers by the indigenous people and to this day, it is used as an astringent applied to the skin to reduce bleeding from minor abrasions, or cosmetically, to reduce skin oiliness. Bathing in, or spongeing fevered skin with witch hazel will bring down temperature, since it evaporates quickly.

Singularly adapted for the cold, it blooms in the late autumn and early winter. The four ribbon-like petals of its scruffy flower roll up in cold weather, protecting the flower's more delicate parts, and then unfurl during warm spells. To ensure pollination, the flower's scent, reminiscent of lemon zest, lures the few remaining late season moths and flies.

Fittingly for such an unusual plant, its ballistic seed dispersal method does not disappoint. Seeds take a full year to mature and then are released explosively with an audible snap, covering a distance of several metres.

Witch hazel could be considered the "patron plant" of patience and perseverance. If you are thinking of adding this intriguing shrub to your garden, know that it is slow-growing.

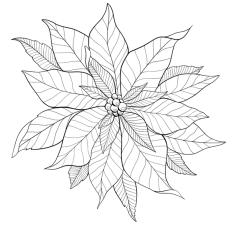
Do gather your patience, for it might take six years to finally flower!



Prayer/Inspiration

From the Garden Ministry

Lord,
Help me to feel
the fear,
the pain
and the loss
that all our relations,
people, animals,
plants, trees, and the land—
in British Columbia and Nova Scotia
and elsewhere on the planet—
are suffering.
Help me to accept,
without flinching,
that I am the cause of their suffering
because of my use of fossil fuels,
overconsumption of foods,
water and materials...
satisfying wants over needs,
insistence on convenience,
use of plastic,
and on and on.
I, as part of my society,
have unbalanced Earth's natural systems
and She is in agony.
Give me the insight
and the strength to feel—
and feeling,
to change what is in my power to change.
Give me the courage and perseverance
to voice my demands, repeatedly,
to my elected representatives—
to change what they have the power to change.



Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

As previously noted in this issue, 2021 marks the 5th anniversary of St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry. The gradual transformation of the grounds surrounding our new church from the "Garden of Weeden" to the oasis of peace and productivity it has become represents a great deal of labour, dedication and support from a multitude of people, including the members of this relatively new ministry. But none of it would have been possible without this great gift of the Passionist Community to the people of St. Gabriel's Parish.

In selling a large portion of the now-urban land they had occupied since once having been surrounded by farmland in the early 1950s, they funded our current church and the gardens around it. As most are likely aware, such generosity is a rare experience. Most parishes enter into years, if not decades, of debt when a new church is built. St. Gabriel's Parish has been doubly blessed—because not only were we gifted with a new church and its gardens, we have been situated in an environment that encourages us to experience God and Creation in a profound relationship we are only just beginning to understand.

When the idea of this church was being discussed in the Passionist Community, Fr. Thomas Berry was asked for his input. He posed a simple yet provocative question: "What are you going to do about the sun?" This might seem like an odd question, coming from a priest. But this Passionist priest was a visionary. Architect Roberto Chiotti designed the church to answer Fr. Berry's question, and thus the walls of the church's interior are animated with the colours of sunlight spilling through stained glass prisms lining the roof windows on the east, north and west sides.



This awareness of the sun and its movement across the sky connects us to the prophetic Theology of the Cosmos developed by Father Thomas Berry, CP. He recognized the relationship between the Passion of Christ (the charism of the Passionist community) and the Passion of the Earth, as it suffers the excesses and abuses of humanity. When this theology was first introduced, the concept of a suffering Earth mirroring the suffering of Christ seemed more an intriguing idea than a reality. With increasing and alarming intensity, however, the consequences of climate change are making that relationship ever more obviously prophetic and profound.



The Passionists serving St. Gabriel's have embraced and empowered that theology, in various ways, some within initiatives, some in actively preaching and others with vicarious support. In the 1970s, Fr. Stephen Dunn and the team at the Holy Cross Centre, the Passionist Retreat House in Port Burwell, Ontario, began to delve into Fr. Berry's Journey of the Universe in retreats and summer colloquia held there. That led to Fr. Dunn founding the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto in 1991, where Fr. Dunn taught Theology and also served as the Institute's first director. To this day, the Institute fosters the study of the relationship between these two once-thought-disparate disciplines. Fr. Paul Cusack, our pastor when the church was built, was inspired by Thomas Berry's work and wrote his PhD thesis about the challenges of preaching the Passion of the Earth. Fr. Bernard McEachern, who with Fr. Steve and Fr. Paul shared a long-time friendship with Thomas Berry, also shared his love of gardens; he has kept a keen eye on the flower gardens at the Passionist Residence here. Exhibiting a green thumb, Fr. Bernard has tended those flowers for years, and consequently, knows and admires the work required to care for the St. Gabriel's Garden.

Our current pastor, Fr. Brando Recaña, enthusiastically encourages and enables the work of the Garden Ministry, which itself promotes Fr. Berry's vision in connecting the sacredness of the faith community gathered in the indoor space with the sacredness of the rest of Creation, as represented through the vast south-facing windows overlooking the garden.



Every time we look through those windows, the ever-changing, vibrant life of the natural world is an inescapable extension of the revelation of the Sacred as experienced in the Mass. It is a reminder that we are a people of hope.

The Passion of Jesus, who died for our sins, is echoed in the Passion of the Earth, now in seeming death-throes—climate catastrophes and natural disasters becoming the norm, rather than “once-in-a-century” occurrences. Yet just as we know that Christ rose from the dead, His resurrection giving life to our faith in God's promised redemptive power, we know that the health of the Earth can also be resurrected. We have seen it in our St. Gabriel's Garden, which has resurrected from the “sinfulness” of neglect to become a haven not only for its community of inhabitants, but human visitors, too.

And so, as we enter this darkest time of the year, let us never fail to maintain what Fr. Paul regularly calls “an attitude of gratitude”, for all our blessings. But let us most especially, in this anniversary year, which is also the 300th anniversary of the Passionist Congregation, thank the members of the Passionist community among us for their generosity and their spiritual guidance, leading us to a deeper, more caring relationship with all Earth communities, an active love of respect and protection for all of Creation, inspired by God's love.



At Christmas...

When Jesus was born,
it was the animals
who welcomed him,
warming his stable home,
the sweet-smelling straw
in the manger
that was his crib,
and the star in the cosmos,
that heralded his coming.
With all of creation,
in awe and wonder,
may we also experience
the Joy and Peace
of Christ-Among-Us.

The St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry prays that
Christmas Blessings
may lovingly embrace all—
Our Passionists,
parishioners,
families & friends,
in this Wondrous Season!

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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.