

ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN



GROWING NEWS

About This Issue

This is a bittersweet time--the first issue of the newsletter's second year, but also our first spring without Father Paul, who completed his earthly journey at the end of December. This Spring Equinox issue is dedicated to Father Paul Cusack, and to his legacy of wisdom, wit, and passion for God's creation. Anyone who has ever heard Father Paul preach will remember his gift for cutting to the heart of the matter, filtering the teachings of scripture into very insightful and practical applications for whatever was happening in our lives in this time.

A fellow parishioner, Vivian McDonough, sent this to me, and it seems fitting to share here:

Envoi

by John Quinn

Sometimes
A voice is sent
To calm our deepest fears

Sometimes
A hearty Laugh
Will banish all our tears

Sometimes
Words will wing
Our dreaming even higher

And sometimes
A mind will set
Our imagining afire

Certainly, this poem encapsulates Fr. Paul's great gifts which he so generously shared with us, "the good people of St. Gabriel's". And it is to his legacy—preaching the Passion of the Earth—that we dedicate our work in the Sacred Space of St. Gabriel's Garden.



In transforming that Sacred Space into a haven for God's creatures, the flora and fauna that live there, and in maintaining it as a place for human endeavour, too, whether for spiritual reflection or practical work in feeding the hungry through our community garden boxes, we are honouring God's creation, and ministering to our beleaguered planet in small but important ways.

The disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray..." They were asking for words. But we know from the gospels that Jesus also taught us to pray through nature. He did not go to the temple to prepare for his public ministry, but into the desert. He used the birds of the air to teach us to trust in God's bounty. Before his Passion and Death, he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Father Paul challenged us to increase our awareness of what we humans are doing to the Earth, and in engaging in the work of the garden, we can contribute to Earth's rehabilitation. We invite you to join us, in whatever way you can.

- Marlene Bourdon-King, Editor



Spotlight on the Garden

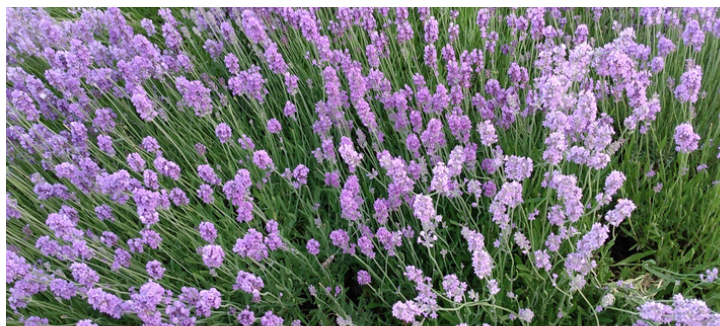
Our sixth year of caring for St. Gabriel's Garden has us more excited than ever about the opportunities to help the garden realize its potential! While continuing to provide food, we hope to meet new people, enhance beauty and invite engagement.

We hope to return to community activities safely, reviving ones we've done in the past, like the Children's Liturgy children planting vegetable seedlings, giving garden tours and holding a blueberry pie raffle. We also plan to launch new ones, like making lavender sachets, gathering seeds for sale, and having the Youth Group paint two Muskoka chairs for rest and reflection in the south garden.



New this spring will be another 5'x5' box to increase the productive capacity of the community garden, and the addition of a three-stage compost unit to expand our compost production for all the gardens.

Although our main focus is the maintenance of the existing garden beds, the lavender bed will receive some special attention. We will also be developing the area in the south garden, west of the main path, transplanting and seeding indigenous flowers from both north and south gardens, and creating mulched pathways.



Given the positive response from participants in last September's Garden Retreat: The Garden as Gateway to Spirituality, one and possibly more retreats are planned for 2022.

We hope to have our 3rd Canada Summer Jobs Grant approved to hire a Garden Helper, and eagerly anticipate increased participation from interested youth volunteers.

Once again, we are blessed with the generosity of benefactors, assisting us with the community

garden: William Dam Seeds will, for a second year, donate seeds; Canadian Tire at Sheppard and Leslie has donated gift cards; Woodhill Garden Centre and Sheridan Nurseries continue to offer us healthy discounts on purchases.

So, though we have a busy season before us, we feel enlivened by the hope that comes with Spring. As always, we are grateful for your support; it is what fuels our endeavours.

Your suggestions and comments are always welcome at sgpgardenministry@gmail.com.

How Can You Help?

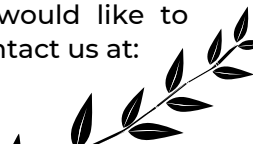
As the focus of this issue is to encourage parishioners to honour Fr. Paul's memory and legacy by finding their way into participating in the work of the garden, we thought it prudent to point out that there are MANY ways to contribute.

The Garden Ministry is a thriving place, where we nurture not only the garden itself, but myriad initiatives that "grow" from it. The wonderful thing about participating in any of these aspects of our ministry, is that we grow with The Garden. We have all found knowledge, learned new skills, and discovered talents that we did not know we possessed.

We invite your help in any of the activities we undertake, and remind you of the opportunities for growth they provide. We are looking for a range of helpers—from team leaders and co-leaders, to people who can only help now and then, to everyone "in between". Below are listed the sorts of activities that we engage in, and that you can contribute to/participate in:

- Administration
- Garden Maintenance and Development
- Community Garden Planning and Care
- Communications (including Newsletter, Bulletin and Website Updates)
- Public Relations (including Recruiting and Volunteer Appreciation)
- Fundraising and Donations (including Seed Donor Sourcing and Donor Appreciation)
- Garden Event Planning and Management
- Construction, Repairs, and Tools Maintenance
- Promoting the Garden as a Gateway to Earth Spirituality

There are more detailed "job descriptions" available. These activities are routinely tailored to the time you have available. If you find any that sound interesting, or know someone you would like to recommend, we encourage you to contact us at: sgpgardenministry@gmail.com.



IF A GARDEN COULD TALK:

Father Paul Cusack's Preaching of the Passion of the Earth

- Fr. Stephen Dunn, C.P.

When our new church was in the planning stages, and it was clear that a garden would figure uniquely in its design, an early proposal would have the “good people” of St. Gabriel's looking out on a vineyard. It was hoped that they would be reminded of the rich Biblical symbolism found so abundantly in the Gospels.

Probably Fr. Paul did not even wait to be asked his opinion. He was like that: he had a gift for the kind of spontaneity that turned situations upside down -- usually provoking a good laugh as he shattered formal expectations. Take, for example, the encounter I described at the beginning of my homily for his funeral Mass.

Imagine, if you will, a bright spacious meeting room. Seated at a large formal table are a handful of serious looking people, deep in discussion. At one end of the table, a moderator. At the other, looking very tense, Fr. Paul. He was defending his doctoral thesis. The people around the table were his examiners.

One of them, Fr. Thomas Clark, a Jesuit scholar and specialist in social justice issues, was finding it difficult to appreciate the emphasis on Creation in Fr. Paul's thesis. He was a gentle man and did not want to seem to be attacking Paul, but he was puzzled by the topic of the thesis: Preaching the Passion of the Earth. He went on and on phrasing his question, but finally asked Fr. Paul for an answer. There were several moments of silence. Long moments. Until Fr. Paul said: “Would you repeat the question please?” That brought the house down.

If you had proposed the vineyard, you might or might not have found it funny when he erupted with

Who will care for it? Who will harvest the grapes?
Who will deal with the harvest?

Or you might have seen the light and agreed with him that it was a silly idea at the time. Since, instead, as the new church evolved, an array of native plants and flowers provided a beautiful panorama, it took some time for Fr. Paul's wisdom to be vindicated. But eventually, the parishioners looked out on the “Garden of Weeden”. *



At that exact stage of the narrative, however, one might suspect that his rejoinder had more to do with his dream of a “maintenance-free” church than his conviction, in preaching the Passion of the Earth, that all of us need a “perspective transformation” to see what a Sacred Garden ought to be.

Oddly, as the new perspective on the garden evolved, it took all of us back to the vineyard, in one important way. The “good people” needed to own the vitality of the garden, see its possibilities for feeding the poor (at Good Shepherd Hostel, for example); lead us back to the soul-restoring engagement with the soil that would get our hands dirty (the Sacred Garden Retreat), get to know the varied plants, trees and flowers by name (because they are truly our relatives) and appreciate their interconnected lives as our Garden ecosystem, a celebration (when our perspective is transformed) of the diversity of life.



This was also where Fr. Paul's appreciation of the Passion of the Earth grew. “Live simply so that others might simply live” he liked to preach. Those who developed the Garden Ministry could fill in many other memorable moments of that journey, including endorsing Robert Cordy's horticulture and learning the perspective of “permaculture” from him, and encouraging the weed pullers, transplanters and harvesters of the Garden Ministry with sincerity and humour.

But there is an even more characteristic example of that preaching. In the gathering gloom of controversy over the need/wisdom of getting vaccinated against the virus that has become, world-wide, an alarming wake-up call to humankind that we inhabit a living Earth, Fr. Paul preached this in his homily:

It's not a shot in the arm that is the cure; it's a shot in the head, a new, positive mindset about our relationship with all the life forms on Earth. A relationship that is mutual and life enhancing. Then we'll be free of any virus. **

That's a Cusack preaching of perspective transformation and the Passion of the Earth!

In his Trinity Sunday homily, Fr. Paul said, "The life and death of each of us has its influence on others." In my homily, I suggested that Fr. Paul's death can have its sacred influence on all of us. It asks us to continue a pastoral path that he began to travel. His favourite saying, "Learn to live simply that others may simply live" will demand so much more of us as our cities burn, our rivers overflow and the ice fields melt. We will have no need for requesting that the question Earth presents to us should be repeated. We can, with Fr. Paul, find our answer in the Sacred Garden:

...ask the animals, and they will teach you,
Or the birds of the air, and they will tell you,
Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
Or let the fish of the sea inform you—
...In [God's] hand is the life of every creature...
(Job 12.7-8,10)

And that will mean that we too will be preaching the Passion of the Earth.

* "Garden of Weeden"....Marlene Bourdon-King

** "shot in the arm" homily and 1st page photo of Father Paul...
Marilyn Calderone



Editor - Marlene Bourdon-King
Design - Nikki Malunas
Garden Ministry Coordinator - Heather Bennett



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