



About Our Garden Ministry

Spring finally arrived, and with it, the expected flurry (no pun intended!) of garden activity. Before the snow was fully melted, we managed timely pruning of some of the fruit trees, to keep them healthy and fully producing.

There was a wonderful turnout of parishioners in May to help with the garbage cleanup once the snow had finally gone. It is always shocking to see how much unsightly trash ends up in the garden, and gathering it all up for disposal is very time-consuming and necessary, but not an especially pleasant task. So we are extremely grateful for the generosity of the many parishioners who gave of their time and energy to help with the "spring cleaning".

In April, Robert Cordy — the sustainable garden designer the parish originally engaged to help us reclaim our "Garden of Weeden" — delivered the first of a series of gardening workshop. The second workshop is planned for July. His enthusiasm is infectious and inspiring. Robert has been very generous in sharing both his expertise and his resources with the parish.



We have again received a Canada Summer Works grant from the federal government to hire a young person on a summer contract. There were three

applicants; however, as this newsletter went to print, the final hiring had not yet occurred, so we are unable to introduce the successful applicant at this time. This is the third year we've been able to offer summer employment to a student to provide much-needed help in maintaining the gardens during our busiest time of year.

Our community vegetable garden boxes will continue to provide fresh produce to the Good Shepherd Ministries downtown, but new this year is devoting two of the boxes to growing fresh vegetables for the Ukrainian refugee family whom our parish is sponsoring. The Children's Liturgy group helped to plant some of the boxes on Pentecost Sunday. The Spirit was definitely moving that day—the children had a great time making their contribution to the future success of our garden boxes.



Our call for more volunteers to help with the extensive maintenance work our gardens require has resulted in the size of our Ministry doubling! This is another indication that the Spirit is indeed moving. These volunteers will help to prove true the old adage that "many hands make light[er] work.". Nevertheless, we can always use more help—please see Heather Bennett's piece which follows, "Spotlight on the Garden" for more incentive!



As our garden begins to reach the peak of its loveliness, we hope parishioners will join us (weather permitting) for “Coffee and Tea in the Garden” on June 25th.

-Marlene Bourdon-King, with notes from Kevin Benoit, Garden Ministry Coordinator



Spotlight on the Garden

As in all the “Spotlight on the Garden” columns I have written, my purpose has been to entice you, dear reader, into our unique treasure that is St. Gabriel’s Garden. Why? Those of you who frequent gardens know the answer: gardens give pleasure and relaxation. Those of you who are gardeners experience an added reason: the reciprocity of care. “As an extension of nature, gardens are perhaps a perfect metaphor for much of what makes us human.” * From dawn to dusk, birth to death, we give and receive care. Gardeners offer care to our plant relatives who, in return, lavishly share their beauty, fruitfulness and their lives. It is in this reciprocity that gardeners experience beauty, wonder, the mystery of new life and their sense of belonging in and to creation.

Of course, this is an invitation to become a gardener – in St. Gabriel’s Garden.

It is an awesome experience to wander through the garden delighting in the prodigious spring growth: huge comfrey leaves ready to harvest, abundant fruit beginning to form in the aftermath of prolific blossoming, deep burgundy irises in the south donation garden shouting, “Look at us!” (and so I do and smile) and more.

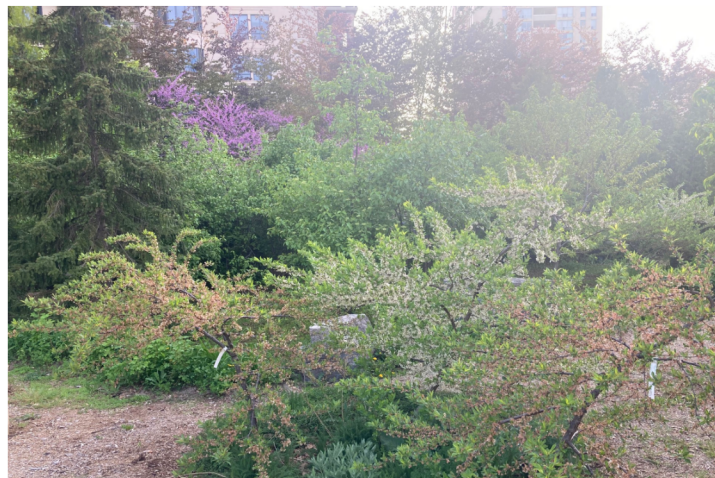
Unfortunately, along with the abundant beauty, I also observe that the cherry shrubs are sending abundant suckers into pathways, weeds are invading the lupins preventing their natural spread, the pear tree needs staking, purple dead nettle is setting up beachheads everywhere in the south garden and garlic mustard is preparing to stage a comeback. Our jewel of a garden needs some caring hands.

As well as volunteer gardeners, (no experience necessary), two positions are available for experienced gardeners: a leader to plan and

oversee the work of volunteers in the north and south gardens, and a leader to plan and oversee the work of community vegetable garden volunteers. If you are interested, please email: garden@stgabrielsparish.ca.

*<https://www.thegardencontinuum.com/blog/why-is-a-garden-a-symbol-of-caring>

- Heather Bennett



Spotlight on the Eastern Gartersnake



It is very likely that Eastern Gartersnakes once lived on the land now occupied by our garden when, in this once largely rural community, the first St. Gabriel’s was built in 1952. While the gartersnake has adapted well to urban areas and landscapes modified by human activity, our garden lacks a water feature, which would provide wider food sources such as frogs and salamanders. Perhaps this lack of water has meant that, as far as we know, this creature is not one of the denizens of St. Gabriel’s current garden.

Some might be relieved, because one of our more misunderstood neighbours is the Eastern Gartersnake. Whether it’s in your own garden or while out enjoying one of the many nature trails in our city, if you spot a snake, it’s most likely this one. This essentially non-venomous snake can be found throughout most of the United States and Canada. The neurotoxin it produces is so mild and small in quantity, it cannot effectively cause any harm, and they are a non-aggressive species, meaning people have nothing to fear from them. The Eastern Gartersnake is a habitat generalist and can be found anywhere, from forests and shrub lands, to wetlands, fields and rocky areas. It is important to remember that all species, even snakes, are important parts of our ecosystems and biodiversity.



The Beginnings

While their colour can vary, these snakes tend to be dark green to black with three yellow stripes going down the back and a yellowish chin and belly. Though they are usually relatively small, they can grow to over a meter in length. While the Eastern Gartersnake is so abundant it is also known as the Common Gartersnake, a similar species – the Butler's Gartersnake – has been considered endangered since before the Endangered Species Act took effect in 2008. This species has a slightly different placement of stripes on its back and a smaller head than the Eastern Gartersnake, but because its appearance is so similar, it can be hard to distinguish.



In the winter, Gartersnakes disappear into hibernation, usually in natural cavities, burrows, or under rocks, but they can also find shelter in basements and old buildings. Interestingly, Gartersnakes actively seek social aggregations to hibernate, coiling together to keep their body temperature high enough for survival. Eastern Gartersnakes generally breed in the spring right after hibernation, typically giving birth to 10-30 live young in midsummer. Like many reptiles, you might spot them basking in the sun during the summer; certainly, they would enjoy the large rocks in our garden for a sunbath.

Road mortality is the greatest threat to both species, and seeing the amount of traffic in our neighbourhood might be another reason they don't live in our garden. Seeing 10-15 dead Gartersnakes during an hour-long summer drive is not uncommon.

Snakes of all kinds tend to be unpopular. But if you happen to come across any of these fascinating, highly adaptable creatures, let's celebrate their diversity. We need to make room for them in our surroundings, for they too play an important role in the interconnectedness of Creation.

- **Fiona Tanton and Marlene Bourdon-King**

As announced in our last issue of "Growing News", we will be gradually introducing the individual stained glass panels now suspended in the sanctuary of St. Gabriel's, above the Garden vista seen through the glass curtain of south-facing windows. These panels are called "The Stations of Our Cosmic Earth". A "Station" is an important moment in the Universe Story that produced an irreversible Earth/Cosmic transformation. Those of you who are familiar with the plaques positioned throughout the walkways of the South Garden will recognize the images reproduced from the stained glass panels.

A grace of our times is the astounding discovery of the origin and development of the universe. It changes our most established understandings of ourselves and other creatures; even the Earth itself. This is a New Story. Just as our forebears responded with joy, thanksgiving, praise and adoration in the Psalms, this New Story is calling out to our religious spirit, to evoke the same response to what we are learning.

We are all part of an interconnected family of humankind and creatures on this planet —flora and fauna, seen and unseen. We are implicated in the well-being of everyone and everything that is part of the natural world, whether we are aware of them or not. What the New Story now makes clear is that Creation continues to unfold; that it is a process, not an event, and that we are part of that process.



And so, let us consider the Cosmic Station entitled "The Universe Flares Forth". Scientists refer to this as "The Big Bang"... the explosive force that began the whole development of the universe. Brian Swimme, PhD, Professor of Evolutionary Cosmology and Director of the Center for the Story of the Universe at the California Institute of Integral Studies, describes it this way in his book, *The Universe Story*: "All the energy that would ever exist in the entire course of time erupted as a single quantum — a singular gift — existence. If in the future, stars would blaze and lizards would blink in their light, these actions would be powered by the same numinous energy that flared forth at the dawn of time."

It was as if God had a spectacular idea—a “eureka!” moment of a universe emanating from His infinite power — erupting like an outpouring of love for what would be. The panel shows “light rods” in the midst of an expanding, reactive cloud, rolling out into space. The central image can also be seen as a multi-branched atomic structure, pointing like a star in numerous directions. The entire panel captures the moment of “ignition”... the moment when everything begins to move out from the centre. We understand that “centre” to be the creative force of God.



The next panel is titled “Our Blue Green Planet Arises”. The eruption of energy depicted in the previous panel eventually gathered itself into stars, galaxies, and clusters of matter to form planets, moons, asteroids, and space debris, some of which formed rings around some of the planets. This panel shows the flow of energy that began to roll out in the preceding panel. In this one, we see it traversing to a white moon in front of a blue green orb — our planet, Earth.

This, we recognize. Pictures from outer space have shown us what our planet looks like from afar — a blue and green jewel hanging against the infinite blackness of space. Fr. Thomas Berry, CP, made this observation in his book, *Befriending the Earth*: “If we lived on the moon, for example, our sense of the Divine would reflect the lunar landscape. We would not have anything like the awareness of the Divine that we have at present. Imagination is required for religious development. What would there be to imagine if we lived on the moon? But think of being born on the moon, and then, coming to the earth. What a stunning, beautiful experience that would be!”

Blue — the sky, the oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, ponds and streams holding all the water that has ever existed, crucial to our survival. Green — the plant life that sustains us all: trees producing oxygen for us to breathe, and millions of plants used as food, or producing food for the lifeforms requiring its sustenance. All are interconnected, as science continues to discover and reveal to us. Just as seeing the Earth from afar is a “stunning, beautiful experience”, so is experiencing a landscape, unsullied by human intervention; or a gardenscape,

carefully tended by human hands. Both allow us to come into direct contact with the marvellous wonder of it all, a gift from our Creator.

To reflect on the New Story of the Universe is to contemplate the incredible and infinite power of the Divine, gradually being revealed to us.

We are in the midst of the gradual unfolding of the Universe. We cannot fully understand it; not yet. But we can marvel at its complexity, and be awed by its scope and majesty. This we can experience in thoughtful, prayerful contemplation of these stained glass “Stations of Our Cosmic Earth”.

**-Marlene Bourdon-King,
In collaboration with Fr. Stephen Dunn, CP**

Prayer of Gratitude for the Beauty of Creation



God, our Creator of heaven and earth,
how blessed we are to be surrounded by
the beauty of your creation.

We lift our prayer of gratitude as we see the
stars of heaven, and the beauty of the sunset.

We are amazed by the seas and waterways
and all that are in them.

We are enchanted by the flowers
and trees which are clothed by you.

We are awed by all the animals you created.

For the beauty of the earth,
the mountains and valleys, the sun and the moon –
we give you praise.

Amen.

-Author Unknown from jesuitresource.com



“Growing News” is the newsletter of the St. Gabriel’s Garden Ministry, published quarterly, at the turn of each season.
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