



About Our Garden Ministry

As always, summer is our busiest season, and this one has been particularly eventful. Even before summer began, we had a lot of help. As noted in the June issue, the Children's Liturgy participants helped to seed our Community Garden Boxes, and subsequently helped with the watering. As well, Fr. Paul and many parishioners came out for the Earth Day Clean-Up in April. Over the summer, many people have worked very hard to keep our vast gardens cared for, where we are constantly engaged in keeping the challenges we face "in balance" with our successes.

Among our successes were: the addition of 10 new volunteers, who together with our superb garden helpers, (recipients of the Canada Summer Jobs Program Grants,) Elia Valenzuela and Adesewa Anifowoshe, played a significant role in keeping our gardens maintained and beautiful; our Coffee and Tea Fund Raiser in June which was attended by over two dozen people; the re-mulching our gardens (18 cubic yards' worth, over many weekends); the summer workshop on Companion Planting by our garden designer, Robert Cordy; the heartfelt thanks from the Good Shepherd Centre for our donations of cherries and peaches; managing to get two harvests out of some of our community garden boxes; and learning how to rejuvenate most of the Cosmic Station plaques that had been peeling and bleaching in the sun. We wish to thank everyone for their time, energy and effort!

Among the challenges we face are the sad loss of two cherry trees, due to rodent activity (likely voles). The remaining trees have been girdled, and will need lots of TLC. We are now at the stage in our garden's development where we need to step back, and re-evaluate not only what has worked well, but also what has to be re-worked to best make use of the land and its potential. We also need to develop an easier way to use the water we collect in our rain barrels.



Another loss that will be keenly felt is Caroline Martin's stepping down from her roles on the administrative team in communication and recruitment. We are extremely grateful to Caroline for her dedication over the years, and are relieved to know she will continue to contribute to our garden's maintenance.

Though the productive season is almost over, there is still lots to be done before we put the garden to bed for the winter. Please watch the bulletin and listen for announcements about opportunities to help with fall clean-up chores. We so appreciate any help you can offer.

-Kevin Benoit, Garden Ministry Coordinator

Compiled by Marlene Bourdon-King

Photo: Caroline Martin



Spotlight on the Gardeners

For the first time, we have the good fortune of hearing the perspectives of the two Canada Summer Job Grant students we were able to employ. Because they had yet to be hired in June, we can now, with delight, belatedly introduce them to you, even though their contracts ended with the arrival of September.



Adesewa Anifowoshe (on the left) is entering Grade 11 at St. Joseph Morrow Park High School this year, and Elia Valenzuela (beside her on the right) is now in second year at Toronto Metropolitan University, studying Social Work. Both worked extremely well and hard throughout the summer months, maintaining our extensive gardens. Here, they share their experiences as gardeners with us.

Because both are young women only a few years apart, they were able to bond as friends, not only in the work they shared, but also in their taste in music, which they played—sometimes to help them through long hours of hot, mucky weather, and sometimes, just for fun. They were able to share how much they learned: the new skills of how to mow, how to use the weed-trimmer, and how to identify other gardening tools and their uses; they also discovered the tenaciousness of weeds, and the versatility of some plants, like day lilies—not only beautiful, and sources of food for pollinators, but also edible as human food. They learned what causes some plants to deteriorate, and what can be done to prevent it. Throughout, they met all sorts of people with whom they enjoyed conversing, from Garden Ministry members to passers-by.

Elia and Adesewa have experienced both how challenging and how rewarding garden work can be. Almost everyone can appreciate the difficulty of working all day in the hot sun, with little shade, but few have had to contend with weeding where red fire ants invade their shoes and gloves! They laughed every day at how bugs loved to land on them, sometimes making them shriek, and at how weeds can magically reappear, seemingly endlessly.

They enjoyed witnessing urban wildlife, including a fox, and a raccoon trying to get out of the rain barrel, as well as an impressive number of bugs.

Some of what they accomplished is readily seen—new Butterfly Weed plants, transplanted hostas and donated roses, mulching in the gardens on all sides of the property, and continuous weeding. Some is “invisible”, such as (ironically) the continuous weeding, the weekly watering, and helping with harvesting fruits and vegetables.

But these young women know how hard they worked maintaining our extensive gardens, and the sense of accomplishment they feel. They know the stories heard from people appreciating the garden or talking about their own contributions to it, and enjoyed the compliments they received on their work. They know (and love) the satisfaction they felt after a long day of weeding. And they know (and will miss) the calm and peaceful feelings of being surrounded by such lovely plants.

We are so grateful, Elia and Adesewa, for your contribution, and you can be very proud of what you have accomplished in caring for St. Gabriel's Garden. We know that both the garden and the parish will miss your joyful and dedicated presence!

-Marlene Bourdon-King, with notes from Adesewa Anifowoshe and Elia Valenzuela

Photo: Caroline Martin

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

At the time of publication, we are just past the midpoint of the Season of Creation, which runs annually from Sept. 1st, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, until October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of Ecology.

After a summer of devastating wildfires throughout Canada, from coast to coast to coast, smoke palls were inescapable, regardless of how far away the hectares of forests relentlessly burned. It feels apocalyptic: a season of destruction, in which despair threatens. But we are a People of Hope, and we know the Power of Prayer. Here's one from the Laudato Si' Prayerbook to get us started:

*Come, O Holy Breath of God,
poured out 'in the beginning'
be with us at this time
of a climate emergency
and an ever-increasing loss of biodiversity.
Over the aeons, the Spirit of God
empowered the universe to emerge,
enabled biological evolution to take place,
and inspired the unique advent
of the human, endowed with the gift
of reflective self-consciousness.*



The same Spirit of God authored the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth, animated His disciples to go forth, and established a new ecclesial community on the day of Pentecost. Be with us once again, as You were in the past, to heal our broken universe so that we can see the face of the Creator God in the wonders of creation. Amen.



-Dermot A. Lane, Laudato Si' International Scholars Tertiary Education Network' (LISTEN). Dublin, Ireland.

"To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope." (LS 85)

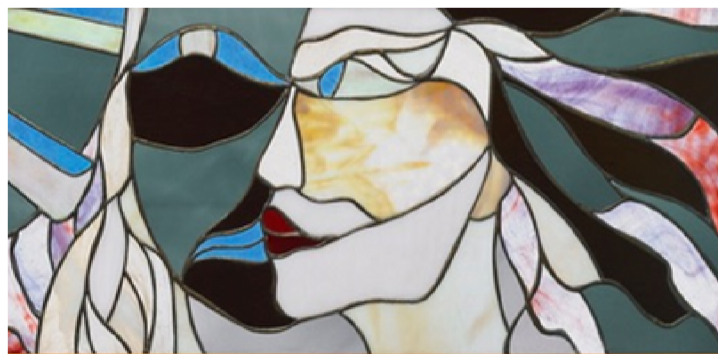
On the Rise...

As promised, this issue will continue our introduction to "The Stations of Our Cosmic Earth", examining the third, fourth and fifth panels of the series. The title of this instalment is "On the Rise", but in fact, all the remaining panels have "The Rise" in their titles, because the universe did not appear "fully formed". Things rose up gradually, over billions of years – a challenge to our customary way of thinking. The first four windows depict irreversible "moments/stations" in the genesis of our cosmos; each one allowing the next to "rise". Each rising is significant to our understanding of the whole *developing cosmos*, and are singled out to narrow our focus on each component.



Once the planet had cooled sufficiently, life began to evolve. Just as our own lives begin swathed in amniotic fluid, so did life on the planet begin in the vast oceans covering the newly formed planet. Some life forms migrated to solid ground. We still have evidence of creatures that live part of their lives in water, and part out of it. We are still discovering creatures that have never left the deeps of the ocean. Likewise, there are creatures who never encounter salt water. But life began in water, and this panel shows representations of what could be the first creatures exploring life out of it...rising from the depths to find their place on land. It also shows the beginning of the formation of the spiral molecule of DNA.

Yet, even as we continue to discover species and intricacies of life forms all over the world, human activity contributes to a devastating loss of biodiversity, as species lose habitat, and climate change accelerates. We have been warned of these consequences for decades. Scientists remind us that we are precipitating a vast extinction of the abundance and variety of the web of life. Thomas Berry highlights the religious dimension of the crisis: *"To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a Divine voice."* We might want to believe that the forces causing these catastrophes are beyond our control, and not of our doing. But in the choices we make, we cannot deny our complicity. As the consequences come ever closer, witnessed tellingly in the rampant forest fires across our country this past summer, we might do well to ponder our contribution to the myriad extinctions of life forms.



In due course came "The Rise of the Human", vitally linked to the evolving Earth, illustrated by the DNA molecule continuing into the top left corner of this panel. Human life evolved through various eras, as evidenced in early forms of *homo sapiens* (wise ape). Life was not easy. Solitary family groups subsisted as hunter/gatherers, dwelling in caves. In biblical times, humans began to domesticate herds of livestock, still living nomadic lives, wandering to find grazing land and water sources. People formed tribes. Tribes became nations. Villages became towns, became cities, became metropolises. But this took place at various rates across the globe and over centuries. Today, some humans have travelled to the moon; some remain in the forest.

The double-helix of the DNA molecule extends out of view on the window, and we are shown an ambiguous human face, depicting our complex nature—capable of both light and darkness, good and evil. The face in profile on the right looks upward, perhaps with determination, but certainly imbued with light, the lips slightly upturned. The other face, looking straight out, is dark and haggard, the lips slightly downturned. This points to the darker sides of life, which in these times, we might find a more accurate depiction of the current human state.





For there continues to be great suffering: starvation, migration, warfare, plague, societal upheaval, oppression, slavery. But this was (and is) all part of “The Rise of the Human”. As Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1950), a French Jesuit priest (renowned as a scientist, theologian, paleontologist, philosopher and teacher) wrote in *The Human Phenomenon*, “*In one manner or the other it still remains true that, even in the view of the mere biologist, the human epic resembles nothing so much as a Way of the Cross.*” As did Our Lord, in our suffering, we partake in its redemptive power. We, too, hope to rise, to follow Jesus to the Father.

The final (fifth) panel we visit here depicts “The Rise of Agriculture”. Humans learned to sow, tend and harvest crops to sustain their lives. This was a truly transformative development. Now, humans could settle in one place, with a much more secure food source. With plentiful food sources, societies could grow beyond family groupings, and excess production contributed to an economy of trade.



An example of early agriculture continues today in the rebuilt Iroquoian settlement at Crow Lake, just west of Toronto. There, we see the indigenous solution to cooperative crops, “The Three Sisters”. On separate mounds, corn, climbing beans, and squash were planted together. The corn stalks supported the beans, and the squash grew down the sides of the mounds, sheltering the earth to maintain moisture.

This is just a small example of the human ingenuity that was part of the transformative role of the “Rise of Agriculture”. The indigenous mounds are echoed in the mounds depicted in the panel, the breasts of Mother Earth. What their example shows us is a way to grow food as the Earth itself produces its abundance. But our present conflicted relationship with the earth is illustrated in the crack of erosion below the breasts. Most modern farming practices are not “good” for the earth, or for sustainable food production. Drought cracks the earth; crops fail; starvation follows. Like farmers, we must remain vigilant, and learn from Earth’s own abundant harvests.

The importance of agriculture is evident in the parables of Jesus, when he makes reference to sowers, seed, and the consequences of those sown crops; he was using concepts that he knew his first listeners would understand first-hand. We know he was using the parable (literally, the story beside) to explain what he was doing with the Word of God. So even if we are not first-hand gardeners ourselves, we understand his message. But for those of us who are working in the garden, the words of Jesus have extra relevance, as we witness all that can happen to the plant before it reaches maturity and harvest, mirroring the challenges to our own growth. Like abundant crop yields, the words of Jesus sustain our lives.

All the “Stations of Our Cosmic Earth” are symbolic representations of the continuing process of Creation. They invite us to contemplate the “macrocosm” of the evolving universe, simultaneously with the “microcosm” of our particular lives, of our place within Creation. We have witnessed how the Earth does just fine without human intervention: abandoned plots soon overtaken by plant life, the regeneration of burned forests, even improved air quality during the pandemic as travel waned. Can we find ways to mitigate our negative impacts—the crack of erosion beginning in this station—and contribute instead to the positive creative forces still active in the marvellous gifts of life our planet provides?

by Marlene Bourdon-King, in collaboration with Fr. Stephen Dunn, CP

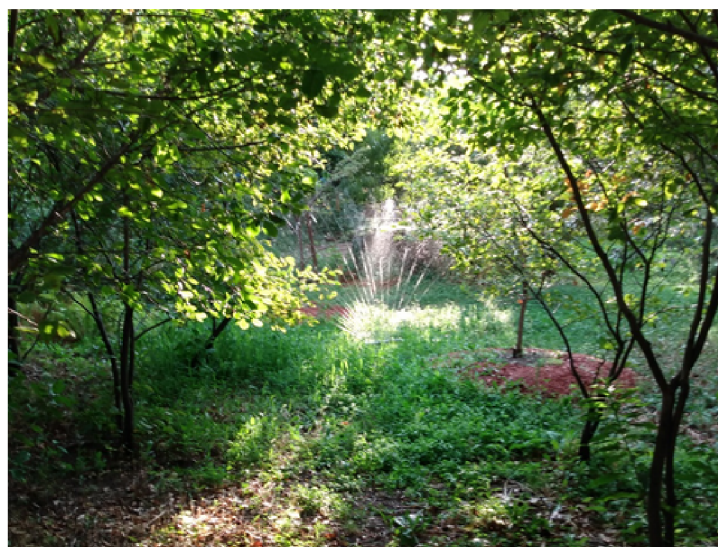


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