

Volume 4, Q3, September 2024

ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN



GROWING NEWS

About Our Garden Ministry



We are excited to welcome some new members to the Garden Ministry, and eager to entice even more new people to join us in caring for the creation we see in abundance all around the church building. As Father Paul Cusack recognized nearly 20 years ago when the present church was being planned, taking care of this massive garden was going to be a challenge, and he was prophetically accurate.



We were also happy to welcome a group of students from the Elliot Allen School of Eco-Theology who came for an extended Garden Tour with our coordinator, Kevin Benoit in July. This connection has been sought for a long time, and so we were thrilled they could come. We now have an "Enhanced" Garden Tour which any group can request in order to learn about the special elements contained in our Garden, both from its planning and implementation, through to its theological implications, as depicted in the Stations of Our Cosmic Earth.

We continue to work with the garden areas that have been established, but nature is never at a loss for something to do. Life always finds a way, and because of the valiant efforts by many over many years, some of our spaces have responded, and are being fairly well-maintained.

But as the growing season wanes, we are keenly aware that other areas have become overgrown, particularly in places where invasive grass has choked out what was intended to be blooming in various places throughout the garden. Or where the success of some plantings has required that we thin out the growth to keep it from becoming overcrowded, transplanting the excess to other "needy" parts of the garden.

Nevertheless, we have continued to produce fresh food for the Good Shepherd Ministry downtown. We have showcased jams and baked goods using currants from our garden at the Parish BBQ, and also contributed to the bake sale fundraiser held mid-September to support the mission in the Northwest Territories, again using our own fruit.



Our hope is to find the people-power, particularly from among our young parishioners, to help us consolidate our efforts, sustain the initiatives we have traditionally supported (such as the Good Shepherd Ministry), and maintain the projects we already have established. We know that our young people, who learn to experience the joy and wonder of spending hands-on time working in the garden, will grow into adults who recognize how rewarding a lifetime of "giving to the garden" can be, and receive the blessings that come with caring for creation.

- MBK



Spotlight on the Garden



It has been a busy summer. This year's summer student, Angel Liz Recta (pictured on the left) worked full time, and was trained by last year's student, Elia Valenzuela (pictured on the right) on garden care days. Elia also worked Saturdays. Together, both worked ceaselessly, doing their best to keep the "unwanted plants" (i.e. weeds) from encroaching on planned plantings.



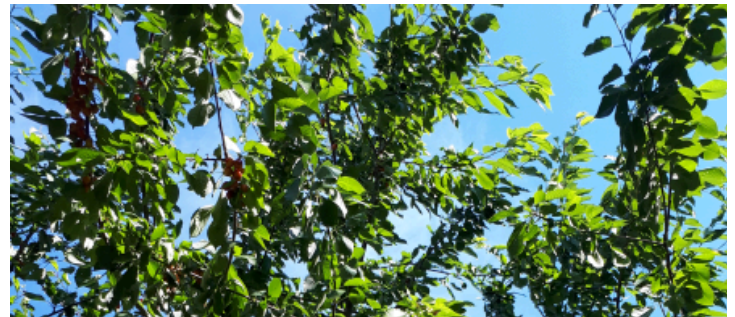
There was a bumper crop of currants, both black and red, and some of the jam was offered for sale to support the mission in the Northwest Territories, where Fr. Brando and Fatima Lee have been working. The blueberries continue to produce throughout the season. Unfortunately, despite signs requesting that the fruit not be picked, some passersby seem to feel entitled to help themselves. Other produce has disappeared as well—not only fruit but vegetables, too. Signs appear to do little to dissuade such theft. Perhaps those who take produce intended to feed the homeless are in desperate need themselves.



Part of the problem is the Garden Ministry's struggle to have enough people to pick the fruit when it is ready. Fr. Dennis has been wonderful, an "unofficial" member of the GM, often seen harvesting early in the morning. Wish we had more like him! Sr. Malou has provided sentinel duty, sometimes able to confront those who take without asking. But it is an inescapable truth that we lose produce. The garden is doing exactly what we had hoped when it was planted: it has become a bountiful urban orchard.



How do we strike a balance between a successful garden and an overgrown one? Certainly, God has blessed us with the ability to grow food in our outdoor Sacred Space. What we need is more people to help us to gather the bounty so that we can share it with those in need in our city. Fruit picking can provide a joyous family activity! We pray that in next year's growing season, we can alert parishioners to upcoming harvest times, so that they can help us gather the bounty for its intended use.



St. Gabriel's Garden



O Glory, what a glorious place!
This is my sanctuary, my sacred space
Where colourful butterflies flutter free
And birds nest nearby in a tree

Here I find quiet and solitude
In the orchard 'midst bounty of multitudes
My escape in the heart of a busy town
Whether at sunrise, midday or sundown

From season to season: renewal, rebirth
While my hands toil away, in Our Mother, Earth
I'm in a state of gratitude and reflection
As I contemplate all that is: it's perfection.

O Glory, what a glorious place!
This is my sanctuary, my sacred space
Surrounded by beauty and nature—elation
In St. Gabriel's Garden, caring for creation.

by Elizabeth Quilliam
Member of the Garden Ministry

The Season of Creation is Now?

by Marlene Bourdon-King, Editor

For the last nine years, since the publication in May, 2015, of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, a "new season" has been added to the liturgical calendar. From September 1st—the Feast of Creation—until October 4th—the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi—the Church celebrates "The Season of Creation", to pray and respond to "the cry of Creation". The theme for 2024, announced on February 2nd, is "to act and hope with Creation."

For those who may never have given it any thought, an "encyclical" is a papal letter sent out to all bishops. Many may also not know that papal encyclicals never bear a title. Instead, they are identified by their opening words.

It is hardly surprising that this pope would begin the first encyclical that was entirely his work, with words from the beautiful "Canticle of the Creatures" by St. Francis (his namesake), which praises the Creator. *Laudato Si'* is Italian for "Praise Be to You". The Canticle, and this encyclical, remind us of the tremendous gifts we were given, and continue to be blessed with, in the creation of the world.

Most will now be aware of the theme and thrust of *Laudato Si'*. In it, Pope Francis focuses on care for the natural environment and all people, as well as broader questions of the relationship between God, humans, and the Earth. The encyclical's subtitle, "Care for Our Common Home" reinforces these key themes. How we care for our common home is a perennial question. How we act and hope with Creation is the current focus.



Hurricane Helene. September, 2024

However, the fact that almost a decade later, we have made such little progress in addressing the abuses that humans, and particularly humans in the "developed world", have inflicted on the planet that is our home, means that "the cry of the Creation" continues. This is not just a poetic metaphor. It is not just that the Earth appears to be fighting back, such as with hurricane seasons beginning two to three months earlier than they're "supposed" to, devastating islands in the Caribbean where people have little recourse to aid, or with perennial "fire seasons" devastating huge swaths of forest, and not just here in Canada. While there have been positive changes, particularly in people's awareness and consequently, in protective legislation, we must not let complacency or despondence interfere with continued efforts to improve the situation.

Placing "The Season of Creation" between the feasts at the beginnings of September and October seems a counter-intuitive decision, at least for those living in the Northern Hemisphere. We do not tend to associate autumn with creation here. It makes more sense for the Southern Hemisphere, where spring approaches. But if we step back from our preconceived notions of appropriateness, and think a little more deeply, we might be very surprised at how much "creation" is happening all around us.

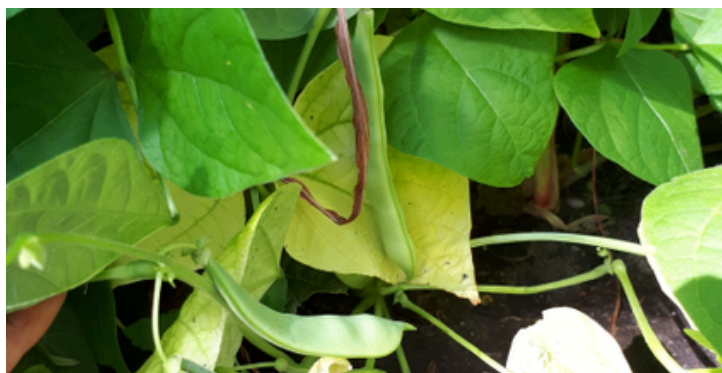
Recently, I took a hard look at our own St. Gabriel's Garden. It, too, seems to be participating in the "cry of Creation", albeit from a different viewpoint. The Garden seems quite prepared to "go wild", simply because it is crying out for more care. This is not to suggest complacency in the Garden Ministry, or that the students we hired on a Canada Summer Work Grant were lacklustre. Quite the opposite—Everyone worked hard!

But as Jesus said (Matthew 9:37-38), in the context of bringing the good news of his Gospel to the world, "the harvest is rich, but the labourers few". The imbalance between the work required and what can be accomplished reflects the myriad other imbalances in our world. There is imbalance in how resources are taken from the Earth, in how material wealth is distributed, in how we organize our lives.

Imbalance exists between those who take and those who give, between those who care and those who look away, between those who are awake and aware and those who prefer to slumber in ignorance. Sustainability can only be achieved when there is balance: but balance doesn't just "happen". Neither complacency ("Someone else will take care of things...") nor despondence ("There is no way out of this mess!") will bring balance.

Rather, we need each of us to do a little, because we know that small actions have a cumulative effect. What each of us does, contributes to the whole, and that "whole" can be a positive, or a negative outcome, depending on our actions. Of course, not all of us are called to the "professional" religious life, though as Christians, we are all called to service, as the last several Sunday gospels have told us. It is not hard for us to hear the "cry of Creation" right outside our church walls. While the state of our garden does not threaten our own lives and livelihoods, as the more dramatic climactic occurrences do, it does provide an unmistakable demonstration of how quickly order can descend into chaos.

In terms of achieving balance in our outdoor Sacred Space, the St. Gabe's Garden, there are many small contributions that will lead to a positive outcome. If each family could find an hour or two to devote to small tasks in the garden, suddenly, there would be many hands, making less work for everyone.



Your contribution can be something simple, like gathering litter and bagging leaves during our weekend "Join Us in the Garden" days. It can be something more regular, like helping to care for one of the community garden boxes once a month, which when shared between four families, would mean we don't lose valuable harvests because there's no one watering or picking the produce on time. It could also mean something more committed, like becoming a member of the Garden Ministry, and learning how to do the more specialized tasks, or being willing to take on some of the less glamorous activities, like removing plants growing where we don't want them (otherwise known as weeding)!

Those of us who have discovered the gifts of working in the garden know that it can become a time of meditation, reflection, and prayer. It allows us to slow down enough to see the many small wonders that easily escape our notice in our "busyness". Indeed, "busyness" is one of the great enemies of carving out time for being alone with God. Somehow, even when we are "busy" in the garden, we are slowed down, because gardening is not work that can be done hastily. It is rhythmical, and necessarily slow, which allows our minds to wander to a conversation with God.

Responding to the "cry of Creation" by donating even a few hours your time and labour to the garden would make a tremendous difference. There are so many jobs to be done, but there is something for everyone. Gardening expertise is naturally an asset, but truly, no prior experience is necessary. Whether weeding or watering, planting or pruning, hauling or harvesting, every action is needed and so appreciated! Fr. Paul has also been encouraging us to be responsive to caring for the Earth, and what better way to start than with our expansive garden!

So, what does happen in the fall? While we might see trees and shrubs shedding their leaves and preparing to enter into a period of dormancy, and annual plants seeming to die, what they all have just completed is the creation of seeds for the next generation. We are preparing to put our garden to bed for the winter, but now is a great time to come out to help, in thanksgiving for everything that God's creation has given us, and will continue to give in the coming seasons. Creation is, indeed, an ongoing gift! Let us not take it for granted.

"Growing News" is the newsletter of the St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry, published quarterly, at the turn of each season.

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