



About the Garden Ministry

Despite this being the sixth year of this newsletter's publication, many may still be unaware of who and what the Garden Ministry is. We are a group of volunteers dedicated to the care of creation—specifically the enormous *outdoor* Sacred Space seen through the south-facing window of St. Gabriel's *indoor* Sacred Space. Without unceasing maintenance, this beautiful garden reverts to what became, within about 5 years of its establishment, a "Garden of Weeden". Since its inception in 2017, just over 10 years after the new church's consecration in 2006, the Garden Ministry has been working to keep the garden vibrant and the weeds at bay.

From the Coordinator's desk:

A long, remarkably cold and snowy winter, and a challenging spring (with soggy, windy, and winter-like weather), brought us unexpected new challenges. Yet, the Garden Ministry continues its work, adapting and caring for creation through what we do, season after season.

We started hands-on work in the garden early this time, dodging the unseasonable weather, tending seedlings, involving the Children's Liturgy, working alongside three Confirmation candidates, and giving a garden tour to newly baptized adults.

We are also thrilled to welcome our newest volunteers: Anupa V., Patrick T., and Eli V.

Dear readers! Your help is greatly needed this season. If you love gardening, or think you might like to try it, please join us! You can contact us at garden@stgabrielparish.ca.

Wishing you a joyful Summer Solstice and God's continued blessings through our gardens.



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

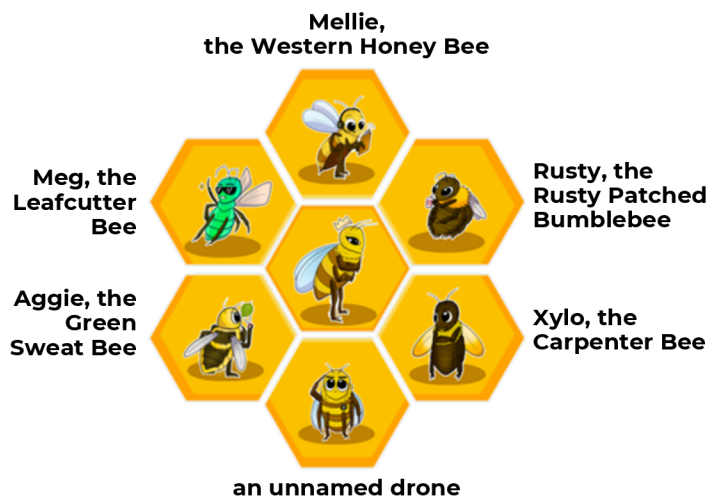
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Spotlight on Bees



World Bee Day was established by the United Nations in 2017, and first celebrated globally on May 20th, 2018. Now, it is an annual event. The date honours the birthday of Anton Janša, a pioneer of modern beekeeping. This year, on the Sunday before, parishioner Maureen Cassidy prepared a display in the Gathering Space to bring awareness of the day and the marvellous creatures we cannot do without. Unbeknownst to most of us, there are many different species of bees that make their homes in Toronto, contributing to the health and vibrancy of our environment. To aid in educating us, Maureen enlisted the aid of one of our young parishioners, Visual Art student Tia Hsu, to create charming caricatures of these species and make them easier to remember.

Surrounding the Queen in the centre of the honeycomb hexagon, please meet:



In honour of bees and their enormous importance to life on this planet, we are dedicating this issue to the bees. We hope that those who experienced Maureen's display, and readers of this issue of "Growing News" will come to a new understanding of these amazing creatures and an expanded appreciation of the gifts they provide.

"Go Tell It to the Bees":

Listen to the Buzz and Spread the Word

Contributed by Pat Ahlberg

Across Europe, there is an old tradition of "Go tell it to the bees"—which means to pass the message on. Bees are believed to have been seen as prophetic creatures, omens of good fortune or success. The beekeeper murmurs news such as births, deaths or other significant news to the bees. And thus, the news spreads. Bees are said to be attracted to a person with strong energy, or to a lover of nature. If you swat away a bee, you may not receive the message sent for you!

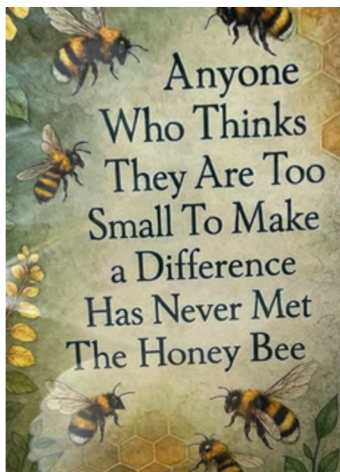
There are many stories featuring bees. An old tale tells that a bee entering your house means a visitor is on his way, and if you kill that bee, the visitor won't be a pleasant one.

If moving bees to a new hive, there is an important ritual. The head of the household or the "goodwife" approaches the hive, gently knocks 3 times on the top of the old hive to get the bees' attention, and then softly delivers the news about their new home in a solemn tone.

In 2022, at the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, the British Royal Beekeeper went to tell the bees that the mistress was dead and her son, King Charles, was now their new master. This ritual was believed to keep the bees informed, to prevent them from leaving the hive. Were that to happen, the hive might die of grief.

Spiritually, bees are linked in folklore as navigating between the physical and spiritual realms. Celtic myth specifically tells us that bees were otherworldly beings, capable of buzzing their way between those realms to pass messages from the heavens to earthbound people. Many pre-Christian peoples, such as the Celts, connected their previous pagan beliefs with Christianity; for instance, the bees were supposed to buzz or hum in their hives at midnight on Christmas Eve to celebrate Christ's birth. Cornish tradition held that bees could only be moved on Good Friday. In other European traditions, bees were associated with Christ as the bringer of sweetness, and the hive represented the church, where all worked together for good. In art, honey and honeybees convey God's blessings, God's love, strength, wisdom, and things of great worth.

The buzz of the bees is profound. Their sound communicates "busy-ness" to us, for we know that bees are incessant workers. Beyond ancient wisdom, we have recently come to appreciate their importance to our wellbeing. Bees understand their purpose, and fulfill it in their short but productive lives. We would do well to follow the rule of the hive, each working for all.



The Little Things Upon Which So Much Relies

by Marlene Bourdon-King, Editor

When establishing the Sacrament central to our Faith—the Body and Blood of Christ given for our Salvation—Jesus blessed and broke bread, and blessed and shared wine. These essential components of the Passover meal became the essence of the Holy Eucharist. The origins of bread and wine contain rich symbolism, each the result of the raw materials of creation worked by human hands to become food and drink, and after consecration, the spiritual sustenance of Jesus within us.

But before the harvest, other work had to occur. We have tended to overlook the other labour invested along the way, although—as is so typical of us humans—we only begin to appreciate what we have once it is threatened. While grain is primarily wind-pollinated, grapes (like most fruit), require bees to produce a harvest. And bees were key contributors to the Biblical diet in another way, because they produce honey. We are told that John the Baptist lived on locusts and wild honey.



Honey is the “liquid gold” produced by bees to sustain them through winter months, or times of uncertain food supply. In its short but very busy 4-to-6-week lifetime, the average worker honey bee produces only 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey—having flown approximately 50,000 miles and visited 2 million flowers! Bees create

abundance. The majority of our most valuable foods are the result of bees collecting their food, and making ours possible through pollination.



Beyond our food, the honey of bees is a truly natural sweetener, which contains myriad nutrients, and is useful beyond baking, cooking, and generally making food and drink more palatable. It can provide skin, hair, wound and burn care, as well as alleviating coughs and sore throats. In addition, honey is the only food that does not spoil, because its water content is so low that bacteria cannot grow in it. Archaeologists have discovered 3000-year-old honey in Egyptian tombs that is still edible! And to store that honey, bees make wax, another useful product for humans. Beeswax candles and their rich and soothing aroma in our churches and homes is another gift of the bees.

It strikes me that honey is a perfect analogy for spiritual food. The Eucharistic food Jesus provides for us, his Body and Blood, sustains our souls and, like honey, never spoils. It is a gift freely given, just as God created bees to provide food for themselves and others. Jesus taught in parables. In some ways, looking at bees is like looking at a living parable.

There are 21,000 species worldwide, and 800 of those are native to Canada. Studying them can be seen as an apt metaphor for how humans could optimize their productivity. God’s engineering of the bee showcases how wonderful living in union with His plan can be: there are bees that live harmoniously in community, and there are bees that live productive solitary lives. Each type of bee lives according to God’s plan, with specialties developed over time, each a crucial part of the wondrous connection between living creatures throughout creation.

How remarkable a creature is the bee! Yet most humans are unaware of how incredible they are. Bees can communicate in complex ways, teaching their sisters exactly how and where to find flowers. From bees, we learn cooperation. Bees can learn complex tasks and change roles within the hive. From bees, we learn dedication and flexibility. Bees can recognize human faces. From bees, we learn the importance of each individual. Bees transform nectar into honey, create food from collected pollen to feed their queens, and even transport water (as they do nectar) to cool their hives and hydrate their community. From bees, we learn the importance of commitment, generously sharing our talents.

Yet, just as tiny bees work tirelessly for the good of their world, as well as ours, we too can become “the little things upon which so much relies.” We can make little changes in our daily lives that will have enormous cumulative benefit.

- Urban natural environments are crucial for the survival of bees, because monoculture and pesticide toxicity in farmland threaten their survival.
- By planting flower gardens that bloom all season long, from early spring into the late fall, we are ensuring a long food-producing season for bees and other pollinators.
- By not digging deeply in our gardens, we will not destroy the homes of ground-living solitary bees, such as bumblebees, which are the first out in spring, and the last working in fall.
- By building south-facing “bee (or bug) hotels”, we can provide safe overwintering places for the insects, such as the highly efficient Mason bees that emerge early in the spring to begin “servicing” the flowers that signal the end of winter.
- By learning that bees (not to be confused with wasps) are not aggressive creatures, we can avoid swatting at or stepping on them. Bees which have stingers (and not all do) will only sting when their life is threatened; the bee will then die, sacrificing its own life to protect the lives it nurtures.

- By volunteering in St. Gabriel’s Garden (a natural refuge in an urban environment) and participating in the work of the Garden Ministry, you can help us sustain the lush interdependence of our plants and “resident” bees. And you can help to harvest the fruit they make possible.

We forget our interdependence. We take our world for granted. We take God’s gifts for granted. We poison and pollute and put the economy ahead of protection of the planet that sustains us. And we ignore the insect version of “the canary in the coal mine” at our peril. Bee populations are in serious decline. If “the least”—that is, the smallest creatures created by God—are deemed “less important” or “less worthy” of respect and support and protection, what hope do we have of human beings surviving the catastrophes we continue to propagate.

May we learn from the bees, to work together for the good of the whole. May we learn to listen, and respond, to “the passion of the Earth”: to take only what we need, to share our abundance, and—to quote the late Fr. Paul Cusack— “to live simply, so that others may simply live.” May that be our purpose: to be “the little things upon which so much relies.”



Prayer for Bees

*Creator God, our Father,
we thank you for the tiny, buzzing wonders
that pollinate our world and bring life anew.
With us, may you protect them from harm.
Help us to choose wisely, to preserve and
nurture the meadows, gardens,
and habitats they need to thrive.
Bless these creatures, vital to our lives,
with abundant food and strong offspring.
Help us to ensure that their crucial work
may continue for generations to come.
Amen.*

(Adapted by M. Bourdon-King from ReformWorship)