

Garden Ministry 2020 Report  
By Anne M. Pokoski

Holy Communion's Garden Ministry was resurrected in 2020 by co-chairs and new HC members Jordan Houry and Anne Pokoski, and a team of enthusiastic volunteers.

Laurie Anzilotti got things rolling by enlisting the co-chairs and arranging a training session with Central Reform Congregation's Food Ministry Garden Coordinator Karen Flotte. Karen gave us a tour of CRC's highly successful garden, where she showed us the tools we would need, advised us on how to coordinate and communicate with volunteers, connected us to Holy Trinity's food pantry for donation purposes, suggested what type of food to grow, taught us about acceptable insecticides, informed us of safe food handling practices, and so on. Her help was invaluable. Neither Jordan nor Anne are gardeners, but Anne is an organizer and communicator, and Jordan is a talented engineer and builder, so the initial set-up work was easily divided between the two.

Jordan prepared a shopping list and budget based on Karen's suggestions. His plan was approved by the powers-that-be at Holy Communion, so he purchased and constructed a garden shed, while Anne acquired the necessary tools. Jordan installed a driphose watering system on a timer. We began the growing season in late May with the four existing garden beds in the yard directly north of HC. Anne recruited a group of approximately 15 Holy Communion helpers, some with actual gardening experience, to sign up for prepping the beds, weeding, planting, fertilizing, and eventually harvesting on Sunday evenings.

Our crops were collard greens and Swiss chard, at the request of Holy Trinity's food pantry patrons and Karen's recommendation. The collard greens struggled, as grey moths ate more than their fair share of the plants, despite our best efforts. Mid-way through the summer, Jordan built an additional raised garden bed. Once the collards had peaked, we replanted almost entirely with Swiss chard, plus a bit of leaf lettuce. The Swiss chard thrived and stayed bug-free.

The summer routine on Sunday evenings flowed more easily as we all became more experienced. To start, some volunteers weeded beds while others harvested. Next, we weighed the crops and stored them in large, food-safe plastic bags while other helpers sprayed for bugs. Lastly, we recorded notes in a garden journal, and stored the crops in the church's kitchen refrigerators, where they would be picked up by additional volunteers on Tuesday mornings and delivered directly to Trinity.

Our growing season ended around Halloween. We were proud to harvest just over 100 lbs. of fresh produce for our food insecure neighbors. For a visual aid, that equals 12 large laundry hampers heaped full of greens. Considering that neither Anne nor Jordan had never gardened before, it was nothing short of a miracle. We were grateful to God for the good weather that allowed our crops to flourish.

Attendance on Sunday nights fluctuated, sometimes with as many as eight helpers, and the next weekend with perhaps just Jordan and Anne. While advance signup was requested, it was always encouraged that anyone interested in assisting simply drop by. This wasn't optimal, but we did always manage to get the work done. In a wrap-up conversation at our last harvest, Jordan and Anne thought it would be helpful to secure one or two more volunteers to serve in leadership roles, so that we could spread responsibilities more broadly and evenly in 2021.

Besides gardening, we hosted a picnic dinner one Sunday evening immediately after a parking lot Service, and offered simple prayer when the timing was right and we had enough participants in attendance. Because of Covid, gardening together was the only opportunity for community gathering at Church, so it was a welcome activity on a social level, and one that we could do safely. Most importantly, it was fulfilling to provide food to those who needed it, especially during such a difficult year.

Thank you to everyone who shared their time and expertise this past year, and we look forward to an even more fruitful Garden Ministry in 2021.