



St. Andrew's garden provides for entire community

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There was a time when people would have their own gardens, would preserve their vegetables for the winter and work together to ensure their neighbours had enough to eat themselves.

The congregation at St. Andrew Memorial Anglican Church has brought that tradition back through its own community garden.

Located in the vacant lot next to the church rectory, the St. Andrew Memorial Community Garden includes 14 individual garden plots, as well as a pollination garden created to support the local bee population.

The vision of the garden, according to Nancy Barwick, community garden coordinator, was to not only engage area residents in a little urban gardening, but to also provide a purpose to a lot that sat vacant since the church was built in 1941.

Rev. Marty Levesque, Rector St. Andrew Memorial Anglican Church, said one of the things the garden has done is show the community that fresh food can be made a part of the diet of those who might otherwise go hungry.

It is something Levesque has been passionate about throughout his seminary process and through his time volunteering with St. Paul's Social Services' Daily Bread Food Bank and Fellowship Centre.

"I just got really tired of giving out Kraft Dinner," Levesque said. "When you work in soup kitchens, when you work in food banks, you realize you give out the worst possible food because it is the cheapest. You try to fill that hole, but you are sending kids to school hungry or you are filling them with empty carbs, so I saw this (garden) as an opportunity."

Levesque said the idea was to open up the garden as a mission project to serve the community by growing good food and bringing it downtown to the Daily Bread and the Fellowship Centre.

From the one plot the parish keeps for itself, St. Andrew parishioners grew over 300 pounds of produce last year. This year they grew approximately 250 pounds, but that wasn't the limit of what the garden could accomplish.

Among the other plots in the 14 in the garden, the Daily Bread Food Bank has its own plot, there are volunteers that came to help out with two others, and then another gardener had to move away so that plot was harvested as well.

An estimated 1,200 pounds of produce was produced among those five plots and sent downtown to help those in need.

The congregation has been "really excited," Levesque said, about what it has accomplished with the garden.

"For a long time they were sort of inwardly focussed inside the building. This garden marked a moment of them leaving their building and doing something for the neighbourhood," Levesque said. "To be in that process of living the mission Jesus left to us and in that sense I think they are really excited about creating one of those neighbourhood gems."

Stacey Clark, one of the neighbourhood gardeners, said she has been thrilled to be part of that process.

Clark lives just a 10-minute walk from the garden and also sings at St. Paul's Cathedral and volunteers with the Daily Bread and the Fellowship Centre.

When Clark and her husband were given their plot, they soon found they had far more vegetables than they could eat on their own.

And so, the extras were also donated.

"I am all for giving the food away. It is amazing how much food can come out of a small space," Clark said.

"Gardening has always appealed to me, even as a kid. I have always enjoyed fresh fruits and vegetables and appreciate that connection with the Earth. I was really happy to be part of a garden where so much of the food goes to people who are hungry."

Barwick said garden plots are leased out for between \$15 and \$40 per season, depending on family income. They are responsible for their own weeding, watering, planting.

"We do engage the whole church," Barwick said. "With our own plot we have a signup sheet in the church where people can take responsibility for our plot for a week at a time, do the weeding, harvesting, weighing, taking things downtown. They are only too happy to."

Levesque said while the entire parish supports the garden, "it is not only for Anglicans, it is for the residents of London."

While the church plot is harvested specifically for downtown, for many neighbourhood residents, they grow for themselves, to do canning and provide food security for their own families.

For Barwick, gardening can be "quite meditative" and a situation where after the plot is established it only takes "an hour or two a week" to keep it going.

However, in that time, she finds a great deal of satisfaction and relaxation. "You don't have to be thinking deep thoughts, your mind is free and your hands are busy. It is very peaceful."

Levesque was quick to point out there are other benefits as well.

"It is food for the spirit, food for the soul. It reconnects you with the Earth, reconnects you with creation and where your food comes from," Levesque said. "It is the whole cycle of life."



