

ST. LUKE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Jesus said "Feed my lambs." John 21:15

The mission of the St Luke Community Garden is to provide fresh vegetables to the Soup Kitchens in Norwich and New London and to the needy in our own community. To achieve this goal, in the Spring of 2012, a garden was planted on a sunny slope in back of the church.

Establishing a new garden is time, talent and labor intensive. Many members of St Luke were involved in this effort as well as numerous friends, Soup Kitchen clients, and the staff and workers from the Eastern Connecticut Community Garden Association[ECCGA]. With all that help, and some heavy equipment, the land was cleared, a large oak tree removed [it shaded the garden area], and a crushed-rock roadway was constructed. The sandy loam was rototilled and [hundreds] of stones removed.

Seven raised planting beds were created, each 3 feet wide by 40 feet long with a North-South orientation. Organic fertilizer [aged horse manure], seaweed, and ground limestone were rototilled into each bed. Because the garden is next to a large forest, a 7-foot high wire fence was constructed around the seven beds to keep out the "critters," which include deer and rabbits. The resulting fenced area is 50 feet by 50 feet with an uncluttered view of the southern and western sky [perfect for gardening]. Frequent watering proved to be a problem, so a programmable automatic watering system was procured and installed. This is quite a blessing!

The construction effort took considerable time, which delayed the planting in that first year. Nevertheless, with the donation of large plants by the ECCGA, a sizeable harvest was obtained [mostly tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, squash, and beans.] The following year we planted flower beds and expanded the watering system. Many truckloads of compost, manure, mulch, and seaweed were added to the beds; greatly improving their fertility and controlling the weeds. Unfortunately the bugs, viruses, and mice also found us, initiating an ongoing effort in pest control.

On a rainy Sunday morning at the beginning of the growing season, Pastor Elaine joined members of the garden team to bless the St. Luke garden. Perhaps this helps to explain why the harvest from this second year has been substantial. Several hundred pounds of vegetables have been delivered to the Soup Kitchens and needy individuals, including peas, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, basil, sage, and loads of green beans [30 to 40 pounds a week over a 2 months period]. Each week a portion of this harvest is placed in front of the altar at the second service in acknowledgment of the truth that this is, indeed, an illustration of the ELCA motto "God's work, our hands."

The garden belongs to all of us and we encourage everyone to take a trip up the hill to watch the miracle and mystery of God's ongoing creation. In the first year children were taught the techniques of planting and growing flowers. They also painted and installed bird houses around the garden. A budding artist prepared the logo for the Community Garden sign. Several family groups were

involved in the construction phases. A year ago we celebrated the conclusion of the growing season with a Harvest Luncheon to pay tribute to all who were involved in the many phases of this gardening effort.

We invite you to consider becoming involved with the garden. Preparation for next year begins in the winter months. From planting the seeds to bringing in the last of the harvest, many hands are needed. No experience is necessary [we will teach you]. If you want to more, please call Rudy Croteau (860-739-3548).

For more information or to volunteer call Rudy Croteau (860-739-3548).