

## The History of the Trinity Educational Community Garden

### **A Timeline:**

Trinity United Methodist Church (TUMC) has been fortunate to have a vacant lot directly next door for over 20 years. A community garden had been on the radar of some forward-thinking members of the church for some time, but it was with the ambition and impetus of our current pastor, Les Lungren, that the project got off the ground. Former pastor, Mike Eggleston, was one of those who had been thinking about the idea for some time. He put together a committee of congregants and formed The Green Team. The Green Team would meet to discuss and become involved with various environmental projects. The Green Team quickly decided that a community garden for Los Osos would be their first large project. The enthusiastic group first came together on November 17, 2024. These individuals would later form the garden's Governing Board. Congregant and local Contractor Bob Crizer and his wife Beth Crizer initiated discussion of the design of the garden. Congregant, Scott Danielson, volunteered to be Garden Manager. Long time TUMC congregant and garden proponent, Patti James, volunteered to co-chair the Assistant Manager with Annie Wahler, the Los Osos Kiwanis Club President. TUMC Administrative Assistant Mary Ann Meyer volunteered to be Secretary/Treasurer, Congregants Vicki Mladinich and Charlotte Dietzel volunteered to work on Public Relations. Community member, Neil Leiberman, volunteered to be Compost Managers. Congregants Joe Asire and Ron Rose volunteered to be the Project Managers. All of the Board is under the guidance and leadership of Pastor Les Lungren. Green Team members, Mike Eggleston, Mike Lindsey, and Charmain Redwood are also on the Governing Board.

The name Trinity Educational Community Garden was decided upon because the idea of the garden being a source of garden education was important from the start. This became a fortuitous case of "build it and they will come" when several of the first gardeners to sign up were enthusiastic Master Gardeners. Scott Danielson and his daughter, Carly Conner, created the logo and a large sign was created and purchased to place along Los Osos Valley Road in front of the garden. It began to attract attention immediately.

Once decisions regarding the size of the garden, as well as type of bed and how many garden beds, it wasn't long before the construction on the garden commenced. From the beginning, TEGC 'Architect', Bob Crizer, and Project Manager, Joe Asire, promoted a water harvesting system to provide a water source for the garden without the need to hook up to the county water supply. Water would be collected, or harvested, from the large, sloping roof of the church's sanctuary, the adjacent church office building and the roof of the Village Children's Center. Some rain gutters were already in place, and others were installed. Amazingly, four large water storage "cubes" were discovered for free in Los Osos. Then, two larger water storage tanks were donated by Light Industries in Arroyo Grande. Finally, the huge 5,000-gallon tank was donated by former pastor Mike Eggleston and his wife, Eileen. Pastor Les Lungren and congregation member, Ron Rose, donated the much-needed water pump. With the addition of several hoses, we were set!

Trinity United Methodist Church has had the incredible resource of the infamous Tuesday Crew for many years. This group of skilled and dedicated gentlemen meets every Tuesday morning to maintain the buildings and grounds of TUMC. Along with Tuesday Crew leader, past Chairperson of the Trustees, John Kersten, worked with a small group to keep the church and grounds maintained, TEGC Project Managers, Joe Asire and Ron Rose, led the dedicated group of Bruce Powers, Mike Lindsey, Ron Dickey, Gary Orbach and Everett Shong (and his mighty tractor!) to take on the garden. Under the continued guidance of Bob Crizer, the layout of the garden was planned. Bob also provided the source of the raised, oval beds. The garden was planned for 30 beds. The Tuesday Crew began constructing the beds, with the help of the Kiwanis Morro Bay High School Key Club, church congregation members and the original Governing Board at community work parties. Soon the beds were being laid out in the garden. The garden beds, once constructed, did not include a bottom, so chicken wire and cardboard were laid out for gopher and weed control. Kiwanis member, Levi Tarpley, graciously volunteered to construct the garden fence.

Ace woodworker, Joe Asire, constructed the garden gates. Joe Asire also planned and constructed, along with Bruce Powers, the garden's drip irrigation system - an efficient, gravity flow design providing water to all 30 beds. The drip irrigation system and garden hoses provide the water for gardeners to use from the three-water storage 'cubes' (originally discovered by Mary Anne on Los Osos Curb Alert for free!) Mike Lindsey organized the physical layout of the beds, measuring for paths and distance from the fences. He created the number system for the beds and painted the numbers on the beds.

In August 2025, members of the Governing Board met to create the TEGC Member Guidelines. A Member Contract and Welcome Letter were also created. Gardeners can rent a bed for \$100/year or \$10/month. Meanwhile, donations for the garden from the church and the community were streaming in. Our diligent, proactive Mary Anne immediately began keeping detailed, official records of all donations and the TEGC balance, having its own budget line in the TUMC General Budget. In the summer of 2025, 9 beds were already pre-reserved. During the summer the area in the garden was prepared for the delivery of the 5,000-gallon water tank very generously donated by Mike Eggleston and Eileen Murta. It was exciting to see that tank getting placed in the garden!

The original goal was to open the garden in the spring of 2025 but later amended to have a 'soft' opening in the fall of 2025 and a Grand Opening in the spring of 2026. At the end of summer 2025, the garden was in a good position for the soft opening. The beds were laid out and numbered. The garden shed had been donated by and moved to the garden location by Joe Asire. Joe also built the initial enclosed compost bin which currently functions as the 'Earthworm Hotel'. Scott Danielson constructed the first Earthworm Hotel, which with the knowledge and labor of volunteer Ren Strong, became the current two compost bins. The fencing was completed by Levi, more rain gutters were purchased and installed on the church buildings to collect water, and all the water storage containers were in place. The garden "cubes" were raised and Mike painted them all black to prevent water contamination.

TEGC celebrated its 'soft' opening on October 11, 2025. Les, Mary Anne and Scott welcomed gardeners who had reserved beds and signed up several new gardeners. By the end of that day, 11 beds had been reserved. Gardeners were able to begin planting! The fall and early winter of 2026 brought substantial rainfall and all the water storage containers filled up completely. The rain also brought plenty of weeds around the beds. The weather became dry by mid-February and was downright hot in March.

During the fall of 2025, Erik Everitt and his father, Nate, of Los Osos contacted Pastor Les and offered two greenhouses to be rebuilt on the garden grounds, as well as greenhouse benches, a substantial amount of weed cloth and several fruit trees and vines (plums, Meyer Lemons, Moro Blood Oranges and Thornless Blackberries), in exchange for a garden bed or two. This offer was enthusiastically accepted! During the early spring of 2026, the first greenhouse was built by Erik, Nate and the Tuesday Crew. Mass weeding and mulching took place to get the garden ready for the Grand Opening. In early March, Manager Scott Danielson conducted the first Gardeners Meeting to introduce them to the garden and discuss procedures and questions. More new gardeners signed up. At this time, there were about 20 beds reserved. Scott also began a monthly TEGC email newsletter.

Planning for the Grand Opening was now in full swing. The ever-dutiful Tuesday Crew continued to fine-tune the grounds, weeding and laying mulch over weed cloth and cardboard. The donated fruit trees were planted by the stalwart Tuesday Crew and new TEGC Master Gardener, Vicki Conte, on a hot March morning. Scott collected more fruit trees during the winter to plant in what will become the TEGC Memorial Garden Orchard. TUMC congregants and TEGC gardeners can purchase one or more of the fruiting trees, shrubs or vines that will grace the garden in memory of a specific person. Several trees have already been purchased and designated, including two apples, two peaches, a nectarine, apricot, fig and grape. Other fruiting plants planned include Pomegranate, Feijoa, and Kiwi. In March, Pastor Les and Scott attended the Los Osos Farmers Market to promote the garden and the Grand Opening. This attracted two more new gardeners.

The garden beds were growing beautifully after the winter rains and the March heat with vegetables, herbs and Anne's lovely flowers!

TECG is already very fortunate to have some enthusiastic and very knowledgeable gardeners included in our initial roster. Anne Newland, a Master Gardener and nursery manager/owner has reserved two beds, including one she has already planted as an herb garden for TECG gardeners' use and educational purposes. She will conduct our first educational opportunity at the Grand Opening! Long time organic Master Gardener Christina Fetzer, from Ireland, donated a sizable amount of organic compost for garden use. Eric Everitt has been involved with and owned large variety plant growing operations, including currently being a Horticulture Consultant and owner of Gorgeous Gardens in Los Osos. Co-Manager Patti James has an extensive background in plant growing in Los Osos, especially with the family Orchid business. Scott Danielson, Garden Manager, has an Ornamental Horticulture BS and a Master's Degree in Agriculture from Cal Poly. He has worked at several retail and wholesale nurseries, done landscaping and used his horticulture background teaching elementary school for 25 years. Pastor Les also comes from an agriculture background and has been a crop and fruit tree grower in his family's legacy. Initial gardeners also include gardening enthusiasts and TUMC members, Bill and Emily Rodenhi, and members of Governing Board and TUMC member, Charlotte Dietzel. Currently, the TECG gardeners constitute a balanced mix of TUMC congregants and community members, which is just what Pastor Les Lungren, the catalyst and TECG "Guru" envisioned when he began considering the idea of a community garden on the parcel of land adjacent to Trinity United Methodist Church.

The Grand Opening was planned for Saturday, April 18, 2026. Plans were to have a presentation, ribbon cutting ceremony by the Los Osos Chamber of Commerce and a picnic fried chicken lunch, free for 200 attendees. Local dignitaries, such as our current Board of Supervisors, Bruce Gibson, supervisor candidates, Jim Dantona and Michael Erin Woody, Assemblywoman, Dawn Addis, the local sheriff and fire departments, and local businesses and service organizations were all invited. The Los Osos Kiwanis Club, who have been incredibly dedicated to this project from the beginning, are invited, but will also provide set-up and take-down services. All the sponsors and people who donated money, materials or time were invited. Local media was informed, and Scott and Les both held interviews with the New Times newspaper. The word went out and interest continued to increase. At the time of this writing, two days before the Grand Opening, 23 beds have been reserved, with one bed for a full year, being held for a free drawing for attendees.

Future plans for the garden are already in progress. In addition to the first Educational Event and the expansion of the Memorial Orchard, the second greenhouse will be built in front of the first greenhouse. It also will include benches for the gardeners to use for propagation and growing plant material for their garden beds. Eric Everitt has also offered to donate planter boxes that gardeners could use to plant tomatoes and strawberries. These could be placed right alongside the greenhouses, taking up little space and allowing the gardeners to use their beds for other crops. Also, the southwest corner of the garden will become a designated seating area for rest and educational purposes. It will be surrounded by fruiting shrubs and contain the plaque commemorating the names of those for whom the fruit trees were purchased. Another special designation, memorializing two former TUMC members, Carol Shupp and John Kelly, whose estate bequeathed much of the funds that were used to initiate the garden, will also be placed in this corner.

This idea that 'germinated' from a longstanding desire to provide a community garden for Los Osos went from a vacant parcel of land to an organized, well planned, water efficient, fenced in, attractive garden in less than two years. With enormous potential for 'growing' and growth, as well as education and community involvement in its future, the Trinity Educational Community Garden has been truly a "grass-roots" effort by a skilled, dedicated and devoted group of local people, sponsored by Trinity United Methodist Church of Los Osos.