



Love Planted in Faith – The Story of Bethlehem's Resurrection Memorial Garden

By: Janis Heier



On the grounds of Bethlehem, a quiet transformation has taken place—one rooted in the memory of Naomi Alexander and her love for gardening. What began as a desire to leave a legacy gift with memorial funds has become a source of peace and beauty for the entire congregation and community.

Naomi's daughter, Linda Ellis, and her partner, Zelda Chapel, felt a stirring desire to create something lasting in honor of Naomi, a devoted, lifelong member of Bethlehem. Linda carries many cherished memories of Naomi tending her garden—hands in the soil, eyes filled with joy. Gardening was Naomi's language of delight. Naomi died in 2023 shortly before her 105th birthday.

When the opportunity arose to renew a worn and overgrown landscape area on the church grounds, a spark of joy was ignited as Linda realized this garden renewal was the perfect way to honor her mother. After the project was embraced by Bethlehem's leadership, Linda and Zelda invested their time, talent, and financial resources, rolling up their sleeves for every step of the project.

Today, this beautiful space has become a place of peace and tranquility and is renamed the **Resurrection Memorial Garden** symbolizing the **Christian rhythms of life, loss, and hope.**

At the center of the garden stands a tall wooden cross. Rising above the new growth of prairie grasses and flowers, the cross bears witness to Christ's promise that life is continually made new. Beneath the cross, **the garden invites visitors to pause, breathe, pray, and remember the hope of the resurrection.**

Benches placed throughout the space extend the welcome that Bethlehem is known for, offering places to sit in silence or reflection. Quiet encouragement is offered to all who enter, reminding them of God's steady presence and the faith of those who have gone before us. The hope is that the garden will be used for various ministries and serve as a gift of peace and comfort to the community.

The Resurrection Memorial Garden project also marks Linda's personal re-entry into active congregational life after returning to Aberdeen from California. As she reflects, "Attending worship is important to me. Worship is like-minded people coming together to follow Jesus in our lives. I love the Tuesday Night Ladies ministry, which is my anchor to this church. I also enjoy serving as a Communion Minister and a member of the Property Resource Team."

This project not only memorializes Naomi; it serves as a living reminder that **love planted in faith continues to grow, season after season, rooted in Christ's promise of resurrection.**

May this garden continue to be a place where grief is held, faith is strengthened, and hope is renewed.

Author's note: A story extra!

The Alexander family legacy would be incomplete without remembering Linda's father, Russell Alexander, who was also deeply invested in the life of the congregation. Years ago, Russell built a large wooden cross for Bethlehem's former chapel in memory of his stepfather, Guy Gunderson. When the congregation moved to its current location on Milwaukee Avenue, the family lost track of the cross until it was recently rediscovered in storage. When Stan Jung, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, asked if the wooden cross could be displayed in the Youth Center, Linda agreed with joy.



Though Russell and Naomi are no longer earthside, their legacy continues to bless Bethlehem today.

Thank you for being a vital part of Bethlehem and for your support. With your partnership and the power of the Holy Spirit, Bethlehem is touching lives each and every day – connecting us with God, one another, and our mission in the world.



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