NEPA Synod Green Team

e-newsletter, Spring 2022

ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.
Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to the first newsletter from the synod's Green Team!

As the team resumes active operations as the pandemic slowly winds down, one of our goals is to produce a seasonal newsletter for the congregations, pastors, agencies, and individuals within the synod. Each season we will share prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, descriptions of notable places within the synod, advocacy opportunities, and inspirational stories of good work being done on our territory. Please feel free to share this with anyone who would be interested!

This Land – Our Home

by Pastor Larry Laine

Lord, we treasure the gifts of this land –
the air we breathe, the waters in hand,
the bountiful soil of creation,
the light of your illumination.

We rejoice at daybreak, in every breath we take,
in every sound we make, in the prayer of your namesake.
in us a spirit of reverence for your air so generous.

May your waters be pure, as in the days of old
when you separated the heat from the cold,
the oceans from the lands – we behold.
Let the waters wash over the fish of the seas,
nourish all creatures, plants, and trees.
May the waters of rain and snow
to yellow crocus show
in springtime meadows flow.
Clouds form – your joyous tears to rain
on fields of grains, wetlands, desert plains.
May the white doves soar above misty blue skies
we look to you, thanking - you have baptized.

The waters filter through soil chromatically purred
into the reservoir below that God procured –
to nourish the land, feed plants, trees,
fruits and grains, flowers. and bees,
barley and berries, buttered corn, and sweet dark cherries.
So vast the measure of your blessing in our arms possessing.
Teach us sacredness in caring, nurturing, sharing.
Teach us your bounty protect
in deepest reverent awe respect -
the land embrace
as the vision - your holy face.

May we always see the yellow-orange colors of morn
the crimson purple rains at twilight high - a child is born -
as we walk this land in your light of day,
lie to rest in the moonlit shadows we pray.
Let us ne'r forget, being less than the angels above -
'our hearts are blessed with light' - our consecrated resolve
where we work and play
caring for your plentiful earth
and live out our day.

As for now, may we cherish the land placed in our hand,
till the soil of goodness mercy in action
nurture plants of kindness compassion
dedicated to the love of justice
in us you have trusted
fulfilling the purpose – your birth
of our shared destiny - your Kingdom here on earth –
'as it is in heaven.' Amen.

Green Tips

- As the weather begins to warm, check the scheduled programming on your heating system – it may no longer be necessary to warm up your sanctuary for hours prior to worship. Dropping the minimum temperature a degree or two is also helpful!

- Plan to service your air conditioning before the cooling season starts.

- As gas prices will be volatile due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and international tensions, remember all of the easy and simple things you can do to improve your mileage: routinely check your tire pressure, reduce or combine trips as much as possible, avoid quick starts and stops, check your air filter, and don't idle if you are parked.

- If you're going to plant anything this spring, either on your church grounds or at home, plant natives!! Our next newsletter will be focused on the benefits of native plants, but there are many: they are more suited to local conditions, far better for local wildlife (both insects and birds), and tend to need less water and attention.

Book Reviews

As spring slowly opens, it remains a wonderful time to curl up with a great book. In most nature literature, we usually think of field guides and other factual but dry reading: not as entertaining as useful. So, I would like to offer you some truly exciting reading that syncs beautifully with our faith journeys. For the inaugural issue of this newsletter, I offer you the central theme of BIRDS.

First up is *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman, 2017

The next time someone calls you a 'bird brain', take a bow and says thanks! This eye-opening exploration of various birds the world over will amaze you with their powers of memory (possibly superior to the average human), their tool-making aptitudes, and mapping skills, to name a few. Although the author writes from a strictly scientific standpoint, the reading shines a light on the magnificence of God's ongoing creation. The great numbers of the species and their abilities to adapt to varying habitats is hallmark to the Richard Rohr phrase "God loves things by becoming them."

Next is *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy* by Dyana Z. Furmansky, 2010

If you like hero stories, this fits the bill. It is the biography of a well-to-do New York woman of the early 1900s who finds herself having to flee a deteriorating marriage for her children's and her own safety and being tricked out of any of her own assets. She learns how to accumulate public support through being a suffragist, and then uses this skill and others during the Great Depression to purchase Hawk Mountain *on a promise of payment* to eliminate the devastation of the raptors there. Like the Biblical woman who gives the most when she gives her meager two coins, Rosalie sets the example for seeing a need and not hesitating to persist, seemingly relentlessly, in ways to restore the endangered, even as she herself had little.

Moonbird: A Year on the Wind With the Great Survivor B95 by Phillip Hoose, 2012

Phil Hoose (pronounced 'hose') has written an incredibly wide variety of books, both for children and adults. I met him personally at a Children's Music Network conference; from the stage he asked us 'Do you know what a red knot is?' Not being sure, I listened as he shared what had caught his own absolute astonishment and called him to write a book which took him from Tierra del Fuego to above the arctic circle. Not much different in size than an ordinary robin, the red knot is a shorebird which migrates the above distance round trip between February and October each year. Without revealing the whole tale, which is more than stunning, the connection which enters *our backyard* is the coordination with the horseshoe crab egg laying season in May on the Delaware Bay (our special watershed destination). The crabs show up just when the birds stop over. Without eating these eggs on their way north, the birds simply would not survive. God provides in so many ways...timing, resources. Work of another birder inspired a son of a Lutheran pastor friend of ours to take action and form a Friends of the Red Knot group when he was only 15, which is cited in the book.

Our Green Team at St. Paul's is called "STiC" for STewardship in Creation, and we keep a basket of these books and others at church for folks to borrow. No need for everyone to spend and accumulate more "stuff" . . . maybe your church could do the same!

Submitted in gratitude, Sue Reier, Saint Paul's Lutheran Church, Orwigsburg

Notable Places: Hawk Mountain

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, which was founded in 1934, is the world's oldest and largest conservation organization dedicated to raptors – birds of prey. Located in Kempton, PA, next to Kittatinny Ridge, it is an environmental gem within the synod's territory. According to their fine website, at www.hawkmountain.org , Hawk Mountain is

- A scientific research center
- An international conservation training site
- A learning facility for all ages
- A wildlife sanctuary and eco-tourism destination open to the public year-round
- The world's largest member-supported raptor conservation organization
- One of the best places in northeastern North America to view the annual autumn hawk migration

It has a visitor center, numerous trails up to raptor lookouts and other points of interest (including a section of the Appalachian Trail), a native plant garden (and an annual native plant sale), a gift shop, and a wide variety of educational opportunities. It's well worth visiting, and would be an excellent location for a congregational or youth group event – and the Green Team is planning for a synod activity there in the fall of 2022.

HAWK MOUNTAIN
GLOBAL RAPTOR CONSERVATION

Opportunities for Advocacy:

National

Did you know that there is a national grassroots organization that promotes creation care within the ELCA? There is, and it's called Lutherans Restoring Creation. Their website, www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org, has worship resources, guidance and ideas for stewardship within congregations, advocacy ideas, and a host of other resources.

Also, the ELCA has an active advocacy office, with periodic email updates, opportunities for individual advocacy, a blog, and other resources: www.elca.org/advocacy. While their scope is broad and they deal with all sorts of issues, creation care is one of their major areas of focus.

State & Local

Similar to the ELCA advocacy office but focused on our state, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, or LAMPa, is an organization that advocates "for wise and just public policies in Pennsylvania that promote the common good," including environmental advocacy. Their website is www.lutheranadvocacypa.org and offers a wealth of information, resources, email alert signups, and more.

LAMPa
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania

PennFuture

And, finally, PennFuture is a statewide environmental advocacy organization seeking to lead the transition to a clean energy economy, to protect air, water and land; and to empower citizens to build sustainable communities. Their website (www.pennfuture.org) describes the resources they offer (including a new podcast), allows you to sign up for emails and advocacy alerts, and a calendar of local events.

Inspiration: Growing the Garden of Fri***eden***s

by Pastor Inge Williams

It was May 2020, and I was checking in on the people of Friedens Church over the phone. I called a parishioner in his mid-80s, who said to me matter-of-factly, "Well, Pastor, I heard you are in the produce business now." Now, this is the kind of man who keeps track of his rain gauge and is one of my most reliable sources for how many inches we got in the latest storm. He has also enlightened me about antique tractors, and I know he and his late wife used to do a lot of canning, so I imagine he would have done well in the produce business. But it never would have occurred to me to describe the garden we planted at Friedens Church at the beginning of the pandemic that way, so I chuckled and said, "well, I don't think we'll be making very much money, but yes, we are growing vegetables at church, and we are going to give them away for free. I hope you'll stop by and see the garden sometime." Many of the members of Friedens Church, Shartlesville are gardeners or have farming backgrounds, and people did drive by to see what we were up to. Because it was already late April and we didn't own a tiller, the fledgling garden team decided to put down black plastic to both kill the grass and provide weed management. We cut holes in the plastic, dug through the lush sod, and planted our seeds. One of the members who grew up on a dairy farm rolled down the car window to tell me, "I've seen the Amish do it that way," with some definite puzzlement in her voice.

The story of the "Garden of Friedens" began with a phone call in April 2020. I had long admired a house on the main drag in Shartlesville with a garden in the front yard. I was impressed not only by the abundance of living green it produced but also because it takes some courage to plant a garden in your front yard. This is Shartlesville, after all, a historically Pennsylvania Dutch community where things are done *in a certain way*. But I knew why the unconventional location: the house faces south, so the best place for the garden was in the front, right along Old 22, for all the neighborhood to see. Shortly after lockdown, I found out who lived there and called to ask if they might want to plant pumpkins or other viney crops on our land, where there was more room than a front yard. It turns out our neighbor had some pumpkin seeds on hand, which we both viewed as more than mere coincidence. One of the council members had some funds from a memorial race that she offered for the other incidentals, and so the garden was born.

After the season was over, I got to thinking about the "produce business" comment. Although we had in fact been very productive vegetable producers and certainly weren't running a deficit budget, I looked back over the season in my mind and discovered: we grew a lot more than vegetables. Unlike a traditional produce business, our garden at church cultivated community, spirituality, and mission. Let me give you a few examples:

- We grew **relationships.** Eight people gathered for the first garden team meeting: they were young and old, members and non-members, experienced and less-experienced gardeners. Most people did not know each other, but since we could gather safely outside during the first pandemic summer, friendships developed. (In my experience, there is no conversation quite like one had while picking beans!) The garden was visible from the road and parking lot, so it became a place people could drop by for conversation. We also got to know our siblings in faith at the UCC congregation down the road, where we delivered our vegetables every third Thursday for their food pantry. In 2021, they partnered with

us for Vacation Bible School, and my colleague Pastor Jason and I discussed food insecurity through the lens of the Feeding of the 5,000. The 20+ kids who came harvested the vegetables that were delivered to the Food Pantry the next day. We also took produce to the local senior center and the Mom-and-Pop convenience store in town: relationships we wouldn't have otherwise cultivated.

Garden Team members Barb and Sue at the drive-through produce give away, August 2020

- We grew a **gift economy.** In 2020, we held a Fresh Produce Giveaway on Sundays after worship. Our neighbors drove through the parking lot and people usually wanted to reciprocate with cash donations, so we had to make a Garden line item in our church budget. Parishioners started donating tools, seeds, plants, tractor time, and their ideas. Members of the garden team and other parishioners even began bringing their own garden produce and started swapping everything from tomatoes and hot peppers to sauerkraut and elderberries. In July 2020, the first zucchinis and summer squashes were placed in front of the altar, and all our giving was an extension of the communion table, where God's gifts are given and received for free. In 2021, we took much of the produce to the Mom-and-Pop store in town, with a sign, "FREE VEGGIES." One day, the owner of the store gave me an envelope: *Thank You from Ruthie* was written in perfect penmanship and there was $10 inside. Gift economies provoke gratitude, invite reciprocity, and inspire further generosity.

Zucchini and summer squash, our first fruits of 2020

• We grew **connections between the seasons of the land and the church year.** As Christians grounded in a liturgical cycle, our life of faith unfolds in seasons: seasons we experience as mortal creatures with the other living beings in our neighborhoods. The church year is marked with hymnody, scripture, and prayer in dialogue with the weather, and in a historically Pennsylvania Dutch community, the seasons hold culturally significant rituals, often agricultural in nature, like the common practice of 'Harvest Home' worship in October or eating sauerkraut on New Year's Day. Throughout the summer, our experiences in the garden frequently dovetailed with the teachings of Jesus in the lectionary cycle. Jesus was a rural person, and his agrarian parables come alive outdoors. Unlike a farm operation, a church garden is a place where you can bless the seeds, soil, and season with song, scripture, and hands-on learning opportunities. Reviving the tradition of Rogation Days (festival days in spring devoted to special prayers for crops), the congregation gathered in the garden after worship in May 2021 to plant the first seedlings and snack on some of last year's popcorn harvest. Mid-season 2020, one of the gardeners warned the squash bugs were laying their eggs and about to wreak havoc, and I couldn't help but think of her role as prophet, warning of the coming squash bug apocalypse. She was right! The insurance carrier had told us not to use pesticides, but organic gardens have other tools at their disposal, too, like crop rotation, non-chemical sprays, and polyculture. At the end of the season, we gathered again to put the garden to bed, read from scripture, and give thanks to God for the harvest. Cover crops planted in December were Advent seeds of hope.

Garden Blessing, May 2021

• We grew **leaders.** The garden team has been a holy experiment, and I have found great joy watching the different team members offer their gifts. Part of my pastoral role has been to nurture the sense of vocation I see emerging in the garden's core team. A 7-year-old member of the garden team is good with his hands, and his parents have seen how responsible he is with tools. He came up with the idea to make us a sign for our produce giveaways, so with their help, he designed and crafted the wooden sign below. Others love to save seed and contributed from their bounty, and I was impressed by team members' hard work. I have noticed how garden team members have become more committed to the congregation's life in general, and how it has given non-members and less-active members an easy on ramp to participation in our life together. This year, the garden team will be exploring role development and volunteer management, so that the garden will continue to be a space where people can build relationships and feel God's presence. In fall of 2021, I joined a Ministry Innovators cohort through Plainsong Farm, a living laboratory for farm based environmental education and Christian discipleship in Michigan. One of Plainsong Farm's objectives is to "resource and grow a network for the Christian Food Movement," and it has been an inspiration to see the way the Spirit is moving through the other 8 ministry innovators to yoke caring for creation and mission development.

• We grew in **mission.** "*You* give them something to eat," Jesus told his disciples (Luke 9:13). Contributing the fruit of our land in an era of uncertainty, injustice, and supply chain issues has certainly increased our congregation's sense of mission. The garden has also been a place of spiritual formation for the youngest among us. In both 2020 and 2021, our (short but sweet) Vacation Bible School included time in the garden. Harvesting potatoes was like an Easter egg hunt… with a lot more mud! The children also weighed the produce and were all smiles when they found out they harvested 119 pounds of vegetables! One of the non-member gardeners told me she would never join the church, and I told her that wasn't the aim: I was hoping the garden would be a place for her to live out part of her vocation. Sometimes, she and her family come to worship now, and when she told me she was looking for a more accessible Bible to read, I was happy to pass on a Lutheran Study Bible! In that moment, she reflected back to me my vocation as Biblical interpreter for this community. I wonder what happens when we think of the land around our church building as an extension of our sanctuary, in a similar way to the circles of intimacy extending from the Holy of Holies in the Temple: the furthermost courtyard was the "Court of Gentiles," and the land surrounding our holy sites can also function as a safe(r) place for people who won't "come to church" to engage God and God's people. The land comes to be a partner in mission and ministry.

VBS kids with their produce haul, August 2021

• We grew **spiritually.** A parent told me about her child's visceral response to empty grocery store shelves in March 2020. Through his tears, she told him, "in a few weeks, we will be able to plant our own garden, and we won't go hungry." Focusing on what we can control in uncertain times gives us a sense of agency and combats fear. The church garden became a place for learning resilience during a global pandemic. The first year I gardened as a young adult, I learned what faith meant on an entirely new level: that a seed can become a vigorous plant is almost an absurdity until you watch the miracle unfold yourself. Jesus recommends learning from the land itself: "consider the lilies of the field…" Gardens shouldn't be underestimated as spiritual teachers: I learned about trusting God, trusting my faith community, and trusting my own vocation in a garden. On church-owned land or in the context of a faith community's life together, a garden becomes not just a vegetable production site, but a place where we encounter God.

• We grew **beauty.** So, for real, okra is spiky on the outside and (often) slimy on the inside, and I couldn't have PAID many people around here to take them… But aren't these okra plants just beautiful? These hibiscus-like blossoms open in the morning and attract pollinators. Sometimes, parishioners would text me pictures they took of the garden's beauty, like a kind of meditation.

We decided to name our garden the "Garden of Fri**eden**s." The meaning of the Hebrew word Eden is "delight." And Friedens' church garden has been a delight, because through us God is growing a lot more than vegetables! We may be in the produce business, but we are also in the business of growing disciples.

Heal us Lord and Renew Our lives

by Pastor Larry Laine

Heal the wounds and scars of this earth whose forests we have burned to charred ashes;
whose trees and flowers we have turned to corporate farms for profit;
whose wetlands we have drained;
whose waters we have polluted;
whose streams, rivers, and lakes we have made tributaries of
waste and garbage that we send to our seas –
plastics to decompose over centuries among the coral and the seaweed.
Instill in us, O Lord, a reverence
for the air we breathe,
the waters we need,
the earth we plow,
providing the abundance for now.

Heal us Lord and renew our lives. Amen.

Thanks for reading! If you're interested in being a part of the synod's Green Team, please see our page on the synod website at www.nepasynod.org/green-team.