

Gardens of Fellowship

Gardens have long been a means of bringing people together to work and share in their labors and the fruits of the earth. Several Christian Reformed Churches have recognized the opportunity gardens provide for fellowship—as well as beautiful flowers and delicious produce.

Sharing Abundance: Peace Church

When she started the garden at Peace Church this spring, Brynna Van Wyk was inspired by urban and community gardening trends—the idea that you can grow a garden no matter where you live, and enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables and the beauty a garden brings. “I saw a garden as a different way to fellowship, to learn something new, and to hopefully give produce away,” said Brynna.

A generous neighbor and member of the church donated space in his garden for the church to plant. Sonia Hendricks from Feed Iowa First provided guidance in getting the garden started. The mission of that organization coincided with that of the Peace Church garden: to provide fresh vegetables to Iowa’s food banks. As the Feed Iowa First Web site points out, Iowa is an outstanding agricultural producer, yet one in eight adults and one in five children go to bed hungry each night in Iowa.

The Peace Church garden is cared for by Brynna and Gabe Julich, as well as several other volunteers who help with watering and weeding. To start out, the garden was planted with 30 tomato plants, 40 pepper plants, and many onions. They also plan to plant zucchinis. After harvest, the produce will be donated to a local food pantry or to a church member in need.

“Our goal is to help within our own community,” said Brynna. “We started small, but we hope to expand next year. We are lucky at Peace Church because we have a lot of people willing to share their gifts—I think having a green thumb is a gift!”

A Growing Tradition: Faith Church

While the Peace Church garden is just getting off the ground, the Faith Church garden has had several years to expand. Four years ago, several flower gardeners at Faith decided to use their shared talents to start a garden. Since that time, the garden has expanded, in both scope and the number of people participating. It has more vegetables than flowers, and includes gardeners of all ages, as well as neighbors, church members, and friends of church members.

The garden is divided into 14 different sections—2 of which are tended by the church garden group. The vegetables they produce are placed on a table in the back of the church for anyone to take.

Larry Groenenboom has been key to the success of the garden from its beginning—he plows and tills the whole garden every year and helps other people with their plots. Linda Jansen, one of the founders of the garden, says her favorite part is working with other people who like to garden and trading produce with them.

“I would recommend it to other churches,” said Linda. “It’s a good project.” But, she noted, it is good to have ground rules up front—at Faith Church, if a person speaks for a plot, they are responsible for buying, planting, weeding, and harvesting that year. It is theirs to plant and take care of.

Faith Church will be a stop on the June 2012 Gateway to Hope Garden Tour. Sponsored by Friends of Chinandega, all proceeds of this event will be used to fund arts camps for Nicaraguan children from poor neighborhoods.

“Our guests were generous last year, and our goal for this year’s tour is the same—\$3,000,” said Sandy Shalin Rhoades, one of the organizers of both the 2011 and 2012 tours.

Admission is simply a free-will donation. The tours will take place Friday, June 22, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday, June 23, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sunday, June 24, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.