



# Reconnecting to God's creation

By the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger, bishop



**B**efore my father went back into service in the U.S. Navy, we lived in rural Ohio. My grandfather and uncles were farmers. I still remember Thanksgiving and the Sunday after Thanksgiving, seeing the vast amount of food—fresh and newly canned—in the chancel between

the altar rail and altar. It was a way of giving thanks to God and also of providing for the needs of the hungry in the community.

As we have become more urbanized, the connection to the land is being lost. We expect food to show up in the store or market. We have lost the seasonal expectation of food availability because it is shipped to us from around the world. We also have lost the community awareness that helps us know who the hungry are in our town.

This is not nostalgia for my youth. It is an observation that we can easily lose touch with those who are closest

to us—our neighbors. The development of community gardens on a congregation's property looks to be a way to reconnect. St. John United Lutheran Church in Seattle has had a community garden for a number of years. I watch it from my office every day. I drive by Luther Memorial Lutheran Church in Seattle and watch the work and the harvesting. There are other congregations that have transformed pieces of their property into community gardens.

I see this as a good development. I've said often that I observe congregations that have lost touch with their immediate neighbors. These gardens are opportunities for the close neighbor to have a conversation about what is growing or where the food is going.

In some cases these gardens provide food for the hungry in the community. Recognizing that need and responding to it is an important step in working toward long-term solutions to hunger in our society.

For me, the garden is a place of relaxation. Putting my hands in the soil is more than just a necessary activity. It reconnects me to the creation that God has made and reminds me that the human creature was called by God to till the soil and keep it. Even in my little dahlia garden I am called to be a steward of God's world.

Our congregations have been blessed with property. Using it to reconnect with creation, the community and the neighbor in need is good stewardship of that gift. □

## Reaching out to our neighbors

**M**aple Leaf Lutheran Church in Seattle has been a host site for a Seattle Housing and Resource Effort homeless shelter since 1996.

More than 20 residents (men and women) come in at 9 every night of the year and leave at 8 the next morning. The residents sleep in the community hall of the church.

In 2009, members planted a garden where residents can harvest vegetables. Already this year members have built and supported a shelter vegetable garden on NE 100th Street of our Parking Plaza. Not only is this a collaborative effort with residents but it also is a message to our larger community.

Adding another service component to our shelter operations engages more of us to acknowledge our guests and makes us visible in the community.

Julie Blum  
*Blum is pastor of Maple Leaf Lutheran Church, Seattle.*

# Northwest Washington



**Kathleen Allasia drives the tractor to get the ground ready for the Pea-Patch community garden. Steven Ellis pushes the wheelbarrow.**



**The Rev. Gary Dalenius (left) and David Starr haul one of the trimmed apple branches. Jan Starr stands in the distance.**

## A greening congregation

By David McNeal

**H**oly Cross Lutheran Church in Bellevue was founded in 1961 on an old farm with a small orchard. In the past few years, Holy Cross has undergone a discernment process to discover what God is calling us to do, today, in South Bellevue. This strategic process uncovered the uniqueness of our land and a group committed to its “best use.”

As the Earthkeeping Ministry Team developed its mission and objectives, it became clear that we are called to help with the area’s food crisis. We recognized the abundance of God’s creation. By teaching people about the root causes of hunger and emphasizing the importance of lifestyle choices, we can empower our members and the community to work together in solving hunger problems.

Holy Cross is using its land to provide a place for people to grow food, to learn about gardening and to build relationships in the community, especially with those of different socioeconomic backgrounds. We are also revitalizing our orchard of more than 30 fruit trees (apple, pear and plum). Our partner, City Fruit, will help harvest and distribute the produce to those in need.

We are developing educational programs on growing and preserving food, buying locally for regional sustainability, and increasing the taste and nutritional quality of food. Plans include building community through enhancing areas surrounding the orchards and gardens, creating events that celebrate creation and harvest, and sharing our resources.

The Earthkeeping team also created the Pea-Patch community garden this year. With limited agricultural

space in our area, we are reaching out to potential partners and Pea-Patch clients, such as food bank clients, the homeless, those without access to a garden (apartment/condo dwellers), those who can help distribute food and our faith community, including the Spanish-speaking congregation that shares our campus.

The Earthkeeping team encourages other congregations to look at their land with an eye toward using those blessings to feed hungry people. Together we can see that all are fed—physically and spiritually. □

### What is Earthkeeping?

Earthkeeping is an affinity group that focuses on:

- Expanding our ability to grow food on church property.
- Improving care of the environment on our church grounds and with our waste management processes.
- Educating ourselves and our neighbors to earthkeeping and sustainability concepts.
- Infusing our worship with earthkeeping sensibilities.
- Collaborating with area faith communities on earthkeeping projects.
- Developing awareness of earth care in the greater community.
- Becoming involved in advocacy to make a difference. □

*McNeal is member of  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Bellevue.*

# A place for giving . . . .

By the Rev. Julie Hutson

“Wouldn’t this be a great spot for a garden?” was the question posed more rhetorically than literally one sunny spring day as the Wednesday morning Bible study group walked along the front of the church building. Wildly overgrown with shrubs, weeds, trees and thickets, Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Seattle, was barely visible behind flora that had gone wild.

The congregation, which had been in conversation with a developer, was considering relocating the church. But those plans didn’t come to pass, and now the future lay ahead as unmarked and full of possibility as freshly tilled land.

The garden question would not go away. It was as if the wind kept the question swirling about the congregation. Finally, as if energized by that same wind, a group from Luther Memorial, whose thumbs were green, appeared armed with trowels and shovels and rakes, ready to get to work.

For the better part of the next six weeks the garden was the recipient of an extreme earth makeover. Overgrown shrubs were removed and either transplanted or given away. Weeds were pulled, trees were trimmed, and a 30-year-old patch of juniper was yanked out with a pick-up truck by a group of Boy Scouts.

Soon the possibilities were becoming more apparent. This space could be and should be a place where God’s creation was cared for even as it housed the church building.

Before long, garden plots were cordoned off and residents were invited to come adopt a plot or simply one tomato plant.

The area around the church has changed in recent years from single family homes to apartments and condominiums. Those residents responded eagerly to the congregation’s invitation to garden with them.

One father of two elementary-age children noted that his son and daughter had never seen vegetables growing. That summer the family reaped the bounty of their garden plot, harvesting onions, cucumbers and broccoli.

The harvest from the garden was also shared with the nearby Greenwood Food Bank.

Located directly across the street

from an elementary school, the congregation installed a path through the garden where children and their families could safely traverse en route to school. Daily these families witnessed the progress in the garden, delighting in each new offering of vegetable or flower.



**Members Chandra Johnson and her daughter, Taliyah McElroy, tend to their garden.**



**The Rev. Julie Hutson and Gordon Trombley participate in the blessing of the Giving Garden.**

Residents from a nearby nursing home made stopping at the garden part of their daily stroll.

The congregation soon placed a bistro table and chairs in the garden, under a tree, to provide a place to sit and rest. It has become a place for neighbors and friends to “come and rest awhile.”

One neighbor’s tears mingled with the earth as she found healing and restoration through her time in the garden and the rhythms of planting and tending.

On a bright sunny Sunday morning, the congregation processed from Sunday worship in the sanctuary out to the gardens, blessing and giving thanks for them and bestowing on them the name “The Giving Garden.” The moniker was proposed by a 5-year-old, newly baptized at Luther Memorial, who noted that the garden gave to us more than we could have ever imagined. □

*Hutson is pastor of Luther Memorial Lutheran Church in Seattle.*