

How Does Our Community Garden Grow? Central Presbyterian Church, Geneseo Community Garden Project Update

We at Central Presbyterian Church (CPC) Geneseo have always enjoyed the lush and beautiful flower gardens that grace our property.



Part of the north flower garden at CPC, May 2017.

But in past year since CPC began to serve as the home of the Geneseo/Groveland Food Pantry, our eyes have been opened to the deeper needs of the community: for healthy food, yes, but also the need to learn more about growing fresh and nutritious food, for gaining a sense of engagement and dignity, and for forming caring and trusting relationships with others in our area. The transformation grant from the presbytery has allowed us to start that work.

Building relationships and a high level of community engagement outside of our CPC membership are not simply goals for the garden project; they are the core of our process as well. We reached out to the SUNY Geneseo VISTA Community Engagement Coordinator, who has facilitated our partnerships with a college fraternity, the college Office for Volunteerism, and even the campus office of Physical Plant and Facilities. The fraternity provided “brother power” to assist congregation members to rip out the existing garden (*gasp*), to lay a base of cardboard donated by local businesses, and to spread mulch.



Two SUNY Geneseo fraternity members (front left), the college VISTA worker (back center), and a CPC member haul and spread mulch to cover the community garden area (November 2017)

We used money provided by the grant to purchase materials for the raised beds at a significant discount from a local lumber yard. Construction began.



Two CPC members cut lumber for the raised garden beds. Back left is an ARC residential home, whose residents will assist with the care of the garden and (literally!) reap some of its benefits (November 2017).

Before the snow began to fly in the late fall of 2017, the community garden raised beds were in place. We were surprised and delighted that an individual donated a bench to place near the garden, so that the garden could also serve as a quiet place of prayer.



The four completed raised beds (about 300 sq ft) and the bench for tired workers and weary souls.

The wintertime “quiet phase” of the Community Garden Team’s work is well underway: exploring deepening relationships with college and high school groups, ARC of Livingston County, Livingston County Workforce Development, Hillside Services for adjudicated and troubled youth, the Geneseo Garden Club, and many others. The church kitchen and CPC members are composting to provide rich soil for the garden, using a compost bin donated by the college. We are designing critter-proof fencing to erect in the spring. We are planning with the Food Pantry which crops are best suited to the needs of the pantry clients. We are consulting with a non-for-profit (an organization recognized as a validated ministry of the PCUSA) and a community organizer, each with extensive experience in such projects.

We thank the Grants Working Group and the Presbytery, and its member churches for making this work possible. One of the unexpected blessings that has already come from this grant is that we were able to leverage the “seed” money that this grant provided to obtain additional funding in the form of the Marjorie Harding Memorial Grant. This grant is specifically designed to provide funds for Geneseo-area projects that encourage social justice and meaningful relationships in the community.

We are eager to step into the spring planting season to see what God grows.

Central Presbyterian Church
Geneseo, New York
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