



Care for Creation Committee Earth Week Activities

Integrating Care for Creation and Care for the Poor

The Care for Creation Committee at Old St Joseph's Church seeks to respond to the goals cited in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, the first two of which are "respond to the cry of the earth" and "respond to the cry of the poor." As a parish grounded in the Jesuit charism we are also called to respond to the Universal Apostolic Preferences. Two key elements are, "working together to care for the earth, our common home," and "walking with the poor, the outcasts of the world, and those whose dignity has been violated, in the mission of reconciliation and justice."

These twin missions of caring for the earth and tending to the needs of the poor coalesced when our committee forged a collaboration with our parish's Faith Food & Friends (FF&F) program in autumn 2023. FF&F, established over 30 years ago, is an all-volunteer outreach program in response to the Gospel's call to feed the hungry and minister to the poor. A nutritious, multi-course mid-day meal is served, restaurant-style, three days a week for around 60 guests. In addition, FF&F provides support services that include placement in housing and emergency shelters, referrals on health issues, and dispensing of toiletries and clothing.

Our committee sought to add to this ministry by introducing the guests to care for creation as a means for enriching their faith lives. The plan we proposed was practical, tangible, and literally down-to-earth. We invited the guests to participate with our members in a neighborhood cleanup campaign in which we would walk along nearby streets and parks picking up cigarette butts, discarded candy wrappers, food wastes, plastic debris, and other types of garbage. Thus far, we have gathered more than 1,000 gallons of trash.

In the beginning we had no idea how this project would unfold, but there was a good spirit behind it that has guided us in ways we could not have imagined at the outset. Like every good sustainable solution, this initiative has provided an upward spiraling of multiple environmental and social benefits. The guests love their role as good stewards in the community, helping to keep-the neighborhood neat and clean. Neighbors witnessing the cleanup have approached them expressing sincere gratitude for their efforts. The park rangers are delighted with the guests' labor in beautifying the parks. This outpouring of praise, recognizing them as valued

contributors to community life, has imbued the guests with an immense source of pride that belies their marginalization by the larger society.

The collaboration is now evolving to include neighborhood leaders who have stepped forward to become actively engaged in working with the guests. The current focus of work is the restoration of a National Park area adjacent to the parish grounds. The guests, together with neighbors and members of our committee, have been uprooting ivy, pulling weeds, saplings, and other overgrowth, and laying woodchips in selected areas. The ultimate goal is to transform this area into a beautiful green space on the corner of a busy urban intersection replete with a resplendent summer garden. This mini-park will be tended to by the guests with assistance from neighbors and Care for Creation committee members.

Our committee will be celebrating this grand collaboration during the Earth Week season with three events. The first event will be the planting of the garden on April 30th. In preparation for this event, the guests were invited to vote on which flowers they would like to see blooming this summer. Their final selection includes: lobelia, butterfly bush, begonias, salvia, calendula, astilbe, lavender, coneflowers, and impatiens.

The second event is a lunch in the parish hall on May 4 in which members of the Care for Creation Committee and FF&F staff will honor the guests for all their accomplishments in the cleanup campaign and the restoration of the green space and garden.

The third event will be Butterfly & Ladybug Celebration Day on May 16th hosted by neighborhood leaders. The guests, committee members, neighbors, park rangers and other invited citizens will convene in the mini-park. The guests will release live butterflies and lady bugs in the garden to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

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