



Photo Courtesy of Katherine Forster

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

POLLINATOR GARDEN

The Trinity Presbyterian pollinator garden in Kanata is home to native plants that provide nectar and pollen to beneficial insects and birds. Native pollinators are an essential component to the ecology of plants, ensuring that flowers are fertilized and food can grow. Supporting a variety of pollinators promotes a strong, biodiverse local ecosystem.

BACKGROUND

Trinity Presbyterian Church has strong roots in Kanata, going back almost forty years. The church recently experienced an expansion and is now located on Richardson Side Road having outgrown its original space. The original church building was known as the “White Church on the Hill” and was the first passive solar church in Canada (designed by architect Barry J. Hobin). In their new home,

their connection to sustainability continues with their environmental initiatives both inside the parish and on their property outside.

The garden project was initiated when the youth group was discussing various social justice issues and how they could make a difference in the world. In the discussions, the youth also voiced their

concern about the state of the environment such as the decline in Monarch butterfly populations. Planting a garden was something concrete that the youth group could accomplish and that could help address the need for stewardship.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

To help with the garden planning process, the youth group leaders made a brief presentation to the youth about how to create a pollinator garden. The focus on the Monarch provided a specific framework for the project. Then the children were given photos and plant information (regarding flower bloom time and insects supported) on about thirty different plants. The children then used poker game chips to vote on the flowers they liked the best, by placing a chip beside the photo of that flower. This helped identify which flowers would be part of their garden.

At the same time, permission was being sought to install the pollinator garden on the church property. The youth made a video that outlined the project's purpose and goals for the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The project received support at the AGM and the video was then used as a tool to seek donations from the congregation. They showed it after the Sunday Service and had tables set up with pictures of the chosen plants, so that parishioners could choose the plant they wanted to purchase as a donation to the project. The youth group's video was a hit with parishioners – inspiring them to support the youth group's project with enthusiasm. Due to the overwhelming support for the project the garden became almost double the size as what had originally been planned. They had both the donations from the congregation and a Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment Fund grant to help start the garden.



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The garden was installed in the spring of 2015 with the help of about a dozen or so youth & family members. Some parishioners even donated plants from their own gardens which made it feel as if part of their garden was now at the church. The temperate weather and abundant rain helped in the establishment of the garden in the first year. Weeding days were organized by the youth minister with a mixture of youth and adults helping keep unwanted plants at bay, which were combined with nature/environment-related scripture readings/prayers and discussion time.

There was a lot more weeding to do than expected in the first year. The church is located in a rural area just outside of Kanata, with the garden located in front of a wild patch. To deal with the weeds, the garden group added mulch which made the second year much easier. It helped both in terms of the weeds and also in terms of retaining water for the plants.

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RESULTS

The garden is now well established after two years. A wood-burned sign was added and a path was installed behind the garden with the help of about half a dozen parishioners to make access easier. The creation of the path was installed with the help of machinery and gravel donated by a local business. One of the volunteers brought a small backhoe that day, while others helped spread the gravel, level it out and place pavers. Over the first two years approximated 20-30 children/youth and 15-20 adults/seniors have helped with the garden. Congregants of the church were offered a tour of the garden to learn more about the benefits after worship in September 2016.



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The perennial plants that are now in the garden will need to be divided at some time. When the time comes, the parish can explore various options in terms of what to do with the divided plants. They could sell them at a garage sale or donate the plants to others who want to start gardens. This will be a great way in which the garden can symbolically continue to expand and provide more pollinator habitat around the city.

LESSONS LEARNED

Recruit project leaders with various skills: Meghan Brown Saavedra was the Youth, Family and Discipleship minister when the project was initiated and her organizing and interpersonal skills complimented Kristen Montuno's plant research and gardening skills.

Understand the administration procedures for the project: For a group within the church that hasn't navigated the administration process before, it was helpful to be guided by staff about key people to talk with and how to get the right permissions, etc.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

It was very exciting for the youth group to find two monarch caterpillars on the milkweeds in the garden during the first summer – a great sign of success and so exciting to see these small creatures after a winter of talking about them!

A side project that complemented the garden was an installation of crocus bulbs in the shape of a cross on the church's front lawn. It was amazing and touching to see the youth working outside in the autumn planting all the bulbs as the light was fading, knowing that it would bring such delight to both the children and the parishioners in the spring.

The garden bed was prepared by doing lasagna gardening (making layers of newspaper, manure, dead leaves, grass clippings and soil on top rather than tilling). The youth group leaders went to collect donated grass clippings and leaves from some of the parishioners and enjoyed impromptu tours of their gardens.



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Trinity Presbyterian Church
1817 Richard Side Road
Kanata ON
K0A 1L0
TrinityKanata.ca



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