

## Cultivate God's Presence For Presentation to Various Ministries

Cultivate God's Presence as you cultivate the straw-bale garden. In "Laudato Si" Pope Francis tells us, "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, His boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains everything is, as it were, a caress of God." Pope Francis encourages us to listen both to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (#49 Laudato Si) This is what the Care for Creation Ministry has set out to do.

The Care for Creation Ministry at Our Lady of the Fields was formed in 2014 as an outgrowth of the Franciscan Course C4C, Care for Creation. No one in the course was an expert, but everyone contributed toward understanding the Course teachings. With the sessions completed, we shared the decision to continue our collective formation of God's free gift of Creation, to continue learning about the growing abuse of God's Creation, to continue learning what can be done to increase the sustainability of the earth for future generations, and to continue seeking ways to educate our brothers and sisters.

The culture of our world is to allow the worldly values of profit, possessions, pride, consumerism, self-reliance, etc. to dominate our lives as opposed to God's values of love, charity, generosity, humility, community, etc. The dominance of worldly values has led to excessive consumerism in the use of fossil fuels to energize our needs, to excessive use of insecticides and pesticides to maximize the yields of produce and to kill off "unwanted" vegetation, to excessive amounts of trash and use of plastics and other non-biodegradable materials to meet our needs of convenience, etc. Our excessiveness has led to climate change, pollution of our watershed, pollution of our environment, which in turn jeopardizes the sustainability of God's Creation.

God created the perfect Creation, all in balance. Humans, with their worldly values, are killing God's perfect Creation. But our faith gives us hope. Following the Gospel messages of Jesus, we can convert the dominance of worldly values to God's values and work to reverse the destruction of the earth, making God's Creation sustainable for our children, grandchildren and all future generations. The Care for Creation Ministry has provided caring information at our monthly meetings. The topics and the key discussion points are as follows:

***A Honey of a Story*** – bees provide pollination for 70% of the food we eat, but they are dying off at an alarming rate from pollution, GMOs, and reduction of nectar producing vegetation

***Protection of the Chesapeake*** – rising temperatures create melting ice caps creating rising sea levels flooding the wetland areas destroying the natural filtration system and killing off numerous species, run off from the misuse of insecticides, pesticides, and fertilizer pollute our watershed, removal of trees and plants remove the natural filtration system

***Opposition to Fracking*** – pressurizing water over miles of underground pathways to extract natural gas has resulted in excessive use of water in drought stricken areas, corrosion of the transport structure, methane contaminated water ponds, contamination of the water table, use of funding for fossil fuel production instead of renewable energy sources

***Waste Management*** – recycle and/or re-use, at-home composting, replace the use of man-made products that have long shelf-lives like plastic or Styrofoam that never decomposes.

***Changing Ecosystem*** – a study of the perfect, in balance nature God had created corrupted with the dominance of worldly values with the industrial revolution and cultural change in society

In reply to Pope Francis's encouragement to listen both to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, in 2014 the Care for Creation Ministry began the cultivation of the Straw-Bale Garden, providing fresh, organic vegetables to the guests served a meal in Baltimore through the Friday Night Ministry. The garden addresses an issue of food safety. The vegetables grow abundantly in a natural environment of straw, sun and organic fertilizer without insecticides or pesticides. Providing fresh, organic vegetables to the poor addresses the social justice component in Caring for Creation. The poor are disproportionately adversely affected by the destruction of the environment. The poor tend to live in more commercial areas which have higher incidences of air pollution. The poor tend not to buy filtered or bottled water and are, therefore, subjected to pollutants in the water table from unfiltered run off. As a result, the poor experience higher levels of respiratory, dermatological, and intestinal diseases; such as asthma and cancers. Less than healthy conditions among poor women of child-bearing age result in higher incidences of physical and learning disabilities in their children.

Thirty-six bales of straw were planted in 2014 and a few hundred pounds of vegetables were produced. In 2015 we planted 71 bales and had second plantings in about 20 bales. More than 500 pounds of vegetables were taken to Baltimore where the guests could select their own like in a small farmers market. In 2015, two honey bee hives were added. For the first year, honey cannot be extracted so that the honey can be conserved for nourishment for the bees over the winter. Also, since our order of Italian bees did not arrive until the end of May, after the most nectar producing timeframe, we needed to feed the bees sugar syrup over the summer until the weather turned cold. In 2015, we also had a pollinator garden of nectar producing perennials and annuals of plants indigenous to Maryland. A bench was added under the mulberry tree, and the garden area took on a peaceful ambiance where one can pray, meditate, and enjoy God's creation. All are welcome to enjoy the garden.

In 2016, the plan is to continue with the straw-bale garden, increasing to 82 bales and planning for more double plantings. We plan to purchase a third box of Italian bees, to extract honey from hives #1 and #2, and hopefully produce a swarm or two. We plan to continue with the pollinator garden and possibly add a rain garden in the water runoff area and an herb garden in the water drainage area. We also are planning to plant 60 bee friendly trees and bushes with a grant from Trees for Sacred Places. We also will continue to work towards making our parish more "Green".

In 2016, we need your assistance to help us cultivate God's presence in the garden. We were hoping that individuals, groups, and families will volunteer to take on the responsibility of 4-8 bales of straw. The straw would be set up on April 9th when the 2 week conditioning process begins composting each bale with water and organic fertilizer in preparation of planting seeds and plantings on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. As the vegetables grow, some would need to be trellised. Weeding would need to be done and then harvesting the mature vegetables and washing them to give to the Friday Night Ministry. We feel your commitment is a good use of your time and talents to provide for God's creation. More detailed instruction will be provided when you sign up.

Perhaps you are interested in honey bees or in being one of the teams to plant and maintain the pollinator garden and Trees for Sacred Places at OLF. May to October you can learn a lot by assisting with feeding and maintaining the hives

and extracting the honey. In the fall of 2016 we'll be contacting you again to help with the Trees in Sacred Places. We'll need about 20 teams to plant and maintain the new trees and bushes. Signups will be after Mass the weekends of Jan. 23/24 and Feb 27/28 at hospitality or in the breezeway. Check the bulletin and flyer. And, you are always welcome at the Care for Creation gatherings, Feb 13, March 12, and April 9. Blessings.