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COMMUNITY GARDEN, THE STORY.....

Since late last fall, the phrase “community garden” has popped up here and there around the church. It’s been mentioned in a few sermons, and in ‘council highlights’ in the bulletin. But it has never been explained in any kind of detail... so far. Here is the story:

Last summer pastor Dean from Next Community and I (pastor John) met with several staff members of the Family and Community Support Services office in St. Albert. We wanted to find out what the community needs were in our part of St. Albert and to ask how we as churches might serve our community.

At one point this question was asked: “What kinds of things can help people who are struggling to manage their households to ‘get some traction’? That is, to learn some good skills and start to develop some forward momentum in their lives. The FCSS workers paused over that question. Finally, one of them said that often involvement in a community garden helps people to move in a positive life direction. They suggested several reasons that gardening with others helps people to grow.

First, a garden is by nature, an exercise in delayed gratification. Plans are made, ground is tilled, seeds are sown, time is invested and there is nothing to eat from the garden for months.

Learning to plan forward and to put off the rewards to an unknown future is a very valuable and transferable life skill.

Second, when people garden side by side the potential is there for conversations, and for relationships to grow and develop. Relationships enrich our lives, particularly in a time when there are a lot of lonely people. As well, a community in which people know each other is a safer community for everyone.

Third, preserving vegetables or fruit for the winter months is a very cost-effective way to provide for one’s family.

The FCSS staff also told us that there was presently a long waiting list for garden spots at the city’s garden in Riel Park. Any potential new land available to gardens would be greatly appreciated.

At that point, I began to wonder if our church property might have room for even a small community garden. It seemed to me that providing space for a garden would be a good way of offering ourselves in service to the people who live around the church. I floated the idea at a council meeting and was encouraged to continue communication with the Neighbourhood Development Coordinator (NDC) from the City of St. Albert.

In time, we received a proposal (copies on back table, also on website) that spelled out in close detail just how a garden on church property might work. We had a number of questions: Would we have people gardening on Sundays during worship services? How would water be supplied for the garden? What would happen if someone was injured while gardening? Etc.

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Those questions and others were answered to council's satisfaction, and council approved the idea in principle. That is, we said that we supported the idea but were not quite ready to give it a full green light. We felt that this project needed the congregation to be on board and to be fully informed about what the garden means and does not mean. We also wanted to see exactly where on our property the garden would go. (See poster on bulletin board.)

As council we have heard some concerns raised by members of the congregation, including the following:

Will this be a new ministry that would take 'people power' when we sometimes find it challenging to staff our existing ministries?

In the current proposal the garden is a **community project on our church property**. One member from the congregation would serve as a liaison and as 'community garden team' member.

How much will this cost?

The NDC has plans in place to approach local businesses for sponsorship as well as a grant application for funds to cover costs related to the garden including watering costs.

How will this affect our current landscape?

As the diagram makes clear, every attempt will be made to minimize the impact on current plants. A final decision about removing any trees has not been made.

What if it does not work out?

The experience would be reviewed at the end of the season by the community garden team and by council and would only continue if both parties were satisfied that the experience has been a positive one.

These are responses to a few of the questions that have been raised. Please take the time to read the proposal, particularly the contract which gardeners will be required to sign. If you have any further questions or comments, please speak to me or to any council member. An opportunity will also be given on February 7 after the worship service.

Thank you,

Pastor John (for council)