



Branches on the Vine

MAY 3 - 9, 2025

FEEDING THE BODY AND SPIRIT

A community garden in New Haven is inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si'

Story by Joe Pisani



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A statue of St. Joseph the Worker stands in the community garden. Fresh produce is donated to the St. Bernadette of Lourdes Food Pantry.

Liam Fama still remembers growing up in the White Hills of Shelton and the pleasure he got from walking through his father's garden, picking vegetables off the plants to eat.

Today, as coordinator of the St. Joseph the Worker Garden of Blessed Michael McGivney Parish, he and a team of volunteers are providing that same pleasure, and nutritional benefits, to scores of families each week by growing organic tomatoes, eggplants, bell peppers, cabbage, kale, spinach, squash, lettuce and a lot more to help feed those in need.

"There are so many people who don't have access to healthy food," Fama says. "They might not because of grocery store prices or perhaps there are 'food deserts,' where they need to travel far to get healthy food. So this fills an important gap."

The community garden at St. Joseph Church on 129 Edwards St., in New Haven, is a social justice initiative of McGivney Ministries group. In its first year, the garden yielded more than 400 pounds of produce that was donated to St. Bernadette of Lourdes Food Pantry on Townsend Avenue, which provides food and other necessities to people, he says.

The discussion about starting a community garden began in late 2022, and by spring the following year, the group broke ground.

Along the way, they received assistance from private individuals and a number of nurseries and farms, which donated seedlings, soil and mulch.

The group also got grants — and advice from a master gardener — from the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, a Connecticut organization focused on environmental stewardship, whose mission is to "inspire and equip Connecticut's religious communities to protect our planet through education, engagement and advocacy."

"For us, it has been important in terms of building community and bringing people together to be out in nature, which is good for your mental and spiritual health because it provides a place for belonging," Fama says.

Some individuals who have benefited by receiving the produce also help with the gardening.

"It's touching people's lives in an important way, rather than just given them something," Fama says, adding that the St. Joseph the Worker Garden has three goals, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*: to build community, to educate and to serve.

"The garden helps the earth by making good use of parish land to promote a healthy local ecosystem," Fama says. "It also helps those in need by providing them with free food."

This upcoming growing season, the garden will be using 12 raised beds after a soil test found traces of lead.

"By the grace of God and many generous supporters, the raised beds were eventually assembled and filled," Fama says. "Looking ahead to the 2025 growing season, there's definitely a lot of potential. In the spring, we plan to plant in all 12 of the raised beds, which we couldn't do last year."

In addition, the volunteers hope to add an educational component to their efforts by offering workshops that provide practical skills and strategies to promote sustainability. "We need help with hands-on work, such as planting, watering, weeding and harvesting," Fama says. "There are also opportunities to join our administrative team, which is engaged in tasks such as fundraising, planning and implementation, and outreach."

Those interested in volunteering do not have to be parishioners, Fama says. The group also welcomes donations of vegetable or herb seedlings, garden tools, supplies or money.

A list of volunteers is being coordinated for the upcoming season of St. Joseph the Worker Garden of Blessed Michael McGivney Parish in New Haven. To participate or for further information, contact Liam Fama at mcgivneyministries@newhavencatholic.org.



Upcoming Events



04/30 - 06/11 WEDNESDAYS 10AM - 11:30AM

SPIRITUALITY OF THE GOSPELS

Sacred Heart on the Lake Retreat Center,
194 Candlewood Hill Rd, Higganum

Scripture invites us to become Christ like in all we are and do. This seven week series on the Spirituality of the Gospels leads us to a deeper relationship with Christ and to a deeper understanding of His message. The sessions include a book that you can order from us or purchase on your own. There will be discussions and a follow up DVD. Suggested donation is \$10.00 per session. To register or for further information you can email or call Sr. Patricia at email: cigrandpatricia@gmail.com
www.sacredheartonthe lake.org



05/7 WEDNESDAY 7PM

DIVINE READING

Franciscan Center, 285 Church St, Hartford

Please consider joining us for "lectio divina" (divine reading.) It is a prayerful reading of a bible passage in order to discern its message for each of us today. We have found that meeting in person gives the experience greater intimacy and impact. If you haven't tried it yet, please do! The process is simple and will be explained each time, and sharing is welcome, but optional.



05/9 FRIDAY 6:30PM

THE LIVING ROSARY IN HONOR OF OUR BLESSED MOTHER

Incarnation Church, 544 Prospect St,
Wethersfield

The Living Rosary is a way to pray the Rosary as a community. Each person represents a bead. That person starts to recite a Hail Mary and everyone then continues the prayer. Consider joining and taking part in this beautiful celebration.

Refreshments to follow in Fr. Crawford Hall.

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Barbra Goldbeck: barbragoldbeck8@gmail.com (860-563-1849)



05/17 SATURDAY 8AM - 12PM

PERENNIAL PLANT SALE

Church of St. Ann, Corner of Arch Rd
& West Avon Rd, Avon

A variety of plants from church members' gardens will be offered. Past offerings have included baby's breath, hosta, cranesbill, astilbe, coral bells, columbine, black-eyed susan, bleeding heart, lilies, sedum, bearded iris, dwarf iris, forsythia, lilac, red spirea, and many more. Proceeds will benefit the Social Outreach Scholarship Program. Knowledgeable gardeners will be available to assist shoppers.

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