



JUNE 2023 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

Delight in Restoring Our Relationship With Creation

A story from our Northeastern Pennsylvania and Lower Susquehanna synods in Pennsylvania

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your community involved in gardening?

Increasing the harvest was the dream of both Wittel Farm Growing Project and FriEDENs Garden. The organizers knew food brings people together, but more importantly, people in their communities were hungry. This memo shares how one congregation's garden transformed its ministry. You'll also hear about how a camping ministry in partnership with strong pastoral leadership now has over 380 volunteers providing up to 20,000 pounds of produce each year.

FriEDENs Garden at Friedens Lutheran Church in Bernville, Pa., knows the meaning of Eden. "The Hebrew word 'Eden' means delight, and our garden is a place where we encounter the beauty of flowers, delight in the smell of herbs and snack on sun-ripened cherry tomatoes," says the Rev. Inge Williams, pastor of the church, celebrating how the FriEDENs Garden transformed the congregation as it partnered with the community. The project started with pumpkins but expanded to a full garden needing irrigation with recycled gallon jugs. "The plants were happy, but our backs were not," remembers Williams. "The black plastic we used for weed suppression became a slip-and-slide while we irrigated."

Thank goodness the project received a Witness and Service grant funded through Mission Support. The church was able to install a drip irrigation system and expand the garden. It also continued to expand local community connections, providing for the United Church of Christ food pantry, offering produce to senior centers and other food pantries, connecting with Plainsong Farm and welcoming 29 people into the garden during a joint vacation Bible school. The church is feeding neighbors with free, fresh, pesticide-free produce, building connections, teaching others about food insecurity and sharing agricultural wisdom and the joy of gardening. [Check out more on their Facebook page.](#)

The Wittel Farm Growing Project, part of Lutheran Camping Corporation of Central Pennsylvania, strives to help feed more than 65,000 food-insecure people in Lancaster County but, just as importantly, to restore the broken relationship between humans and the land — to encounter God's creation. Beginning in 2016 with a 1-acre garden and a hundred volunteers and continuing in 2021 with up to 10 acres and 380 volunteers, this ministry partners with not only food pantries and Central Pennsylvania Food Bank but also Lancaster General Health and Lancaster County Food Hub, making sure the harvest is shared far and wide.

With the support of the synod, ELCA World Hunger, individuals and the Farm Land Trust, Wittel Farm Growing Project sees its purpose as educating people about eco-justice and providing experiences to explore it. From hearing the songs of over 17 bird species to building both food gardens and abundant pollinator gardens, to housing bee hives and native cellophane bees, to drawing volunteers from three local colleges and even hiring summer staff, to having Bishop Eaton enjoy some early harvest lettuce on a visit, Wittel Farm is a place where people can remember where our food comes from and consider our important relationship with God's creation. Learn more at: www.facebook.com/TheWittelFarm/.



Bishop Eaton visits Wittel Farm in June during the Lower Susquehanna Synod Assembly. Photo: Kellen Michalowski

ENGAGE WITH US

Upcoming Stewardship Webinar: "Stewardship When Economics Are Uncertain"

The economy has been unpredictable as we slowly emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment remains low, yet interest rates have jumped considerably, and with three very public bank failures this year, people are being more cautious with their resources. How can we talk about stewardship and money in a way that is honest and honors uncertain economic times? On Aug. 21 the ELCA, in partnership with the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, will host a webinar geared toward helping leaders talk openly, honestly and inspirationally about stewardship and generosity, even in uncertain times. The webinar will be led by the Rev. Meredith McNabb and the Rev. Tim Brown.

Mark your calendar: "Stewardship When Economics Are Uncertain"

Monday, Aug. 21, 6-7 p.m. Central time

Active On the day of training: [Zoom Link](#)

OR GO TO <https://zoom.us/join> & insert Meeting ID: 835 7971 8246 Password: 000320

One tap mobile: +13017158592,,83579718246# US (Washington DC)

GRATEFUL

We are truly grateful for the many people who have shared their inspiring stories over the last five months. You have told us how cookies draw college students toward campus ministry, how gathering lay leaders not only equips them but realizes the mission of a synod, how ELCA ministry-with-children resources can bring kids deeper into God's love, how a successful prison-release ministry can be like eHarmony and, this month, how gardening both respects God's creation and serves our neighbor. We are grateful for each person's story and inspired by the work being done. Together we have many more stories to create.

Blessings from your churchwide organization Mission Support team,
Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Mission Support
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

