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IN THIS ISSUE:

Catholic Social Teaching:
Caring for the Earth through
Little Daily Actions

page 1

How to Get Started

page 2

Catholic Charities of
Louisville: Common Earth

page 3

Additional Contacts and
Resources

page 3



Working to Reduce Poverty in America.



Catholic Social Teaching: Caring for the Earth through Little Daily Actions

By Colleen Mayer

In May 2015, Pope Francis released his groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home*. The pope writes to address an urgent crisis: “This sister (Mother Earth) now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her... (T)he earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (LS §2). Unlike

previous encyclicals addressed to “the Catholic world” or “men and women of goodwill,” *Laudato Si* is addressed to all people that call the earth home: the addressee of the letter is “every living person on the planet” (LS §3). The pope calls for nothing short of an “interior conversion” and an “ecological conversion” where the faithful work to cultivate virtues through “care for creation through little daily actions” (LS §211, 217).

The *Common Earth* program, which Catholic Charities of Louisville created, weaves together many of the core teachings of *Laudato Si*. Through the “little daily actions” of cultivating community gardens, the program invites refugees, and the faith community as a whole, to practice careful stewardship of the land by growing healthy food. Through feeding the hungry, engaging the refugee community, and carefully cultivating the land, the *Common Earth* program answers the pope’s call to develop “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (LS §139).

Collen Mayer is Social Services Department Director for Catholic Charities of Tennessee.

How do I get started? By Shelia Herlihy

Working with immigrants and refugees can be an intimidating project, both for those newly arrived, and for the receiving community. Similarly, starting a community garden is overwhelming at first glance, since there are so many steps. However, by an innovative combination of these two priorities, Catholic Charities of Louisville was able to create a sustainable ministry that benefits all involved.

Tips for Community Garden

- Find a site, and get approval (at a parish, school, or local community space).
- Determine what kind of garden you want (raised beds, vs in-ground; vegetable vs flowers)
- Determine the use of the garden (families will be in charge of their own plot, vs all community members will help care for, and produce will be shared or donated).
- Talk to others in the community who are involved in gardening. They can give tips for what to plant, when to start, and what are potential pitfalls (local Master

Gardener/Agricultural groups, people at farmers’ market, or home improvement stores are a good place to start).

- Within the parish context, root the mission of the garden in Catholic Social Teaching and care for creation (St Francis of Assisi, *Laudato Si*’).

Tips for Engaging Immigrants/ Refugees

- Bridge the language barrier: know who in your parish or agency can serve as an interpreter.
- Have opportunities for fellowship and conversation (coffee hours, bilingual movie nights, worship services).
- Provide chances to work together on a project (garden, food ministry distribution, Christian Formation classes).
- Share stories of heritage of immigration.
- Help promote global solidarity around the organization (parish, agency or school) by providing information about countries of origin of immigrants.
- Work on advocacy around immigrants’ rights.

Shelia Herlihy is coordinator of Justice and Charity at Church of the Incarnation in Charlottesville, VA.



Catholic Charities of Louisville: Common Earth

In 2008 when Catholic Charities of Louisville started the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program, now known as Common Earth, it was specifically developed as an opportunity for the refugee community to work in urban gardens; growing produce to market and for personal use.

An opportunity to expand the agricultural program to the wider community arose in 2013 when the refugee funding for this program expired. Parishes were invited to host gardens on parish property, with the understanding that plots would be available to both refugee clients and parishioners. As of the 2015 growing season four parish gardens were established with nearly 200 growers, including community members, parishioners and refugees.

Catholic Charities of Louisville's Common Earth program now has eight operating gardens with one more opening just in time for 2016 growing season. During the 2015 season 9.25 acres produced 342,490 lbs of produce valued at \$513,735. With the addition of a one acre garden and 100 growers, the Common Earth program expects to increase production by 20% for the upcoming 2016 season. The following results have been seen from this growing system; refugee growers are selling produce to supplement income, refugee growers using produce to cut household grocery cost, and a parish providing produce for a local food bank.

While this program was originally created as an opportunity for our refugee brothers and sisters, it has grown into a program that weaves together Louisville's diverse community for the common good.

Chris Martini
Catholic Charities of Louisville

Mark Bouchard
Catholic Charities of Louisville

“Refugee growers sold produce to supplement income, and they used the produce to also cut household grocery cost.”



Additional Contacts and Resources

Catholic Charities of Louisville sponsors the Common Earth initiative profiled in this newsletter. A complete program description may be found at grow.cclou.org. For more information, contact Mark Bouchard at mbouchard@archlou.org or Chris Martini at cmartini@archlou.org.

Catholic Community Services of Rockland (CCSR) sponsors a Community Garden of Love, which distributes fresh food to local pantries and is used to teach about food insecurity. Today, CCSR is working with a local parish and Good Samaritan Hospital to create a community vegetable garden. Visit www.ccsrockland.org or contact Martha Robles, Executive Director of CCSR, at Martha.Robles@archny.org

Mary Lou Ledgerwood is a Master Gardener through the University of California Cooperative Extension who helped establish a resource-rich website for those interested in community gardens: www.mgorange.ucanr.edu. Click the Community Garden section to the left.