



GROWING COMMUNITY

How one garden helps feed those in need

ANNA RZENWNICKI WAS BEING MODEST. After all, two hundred pounds of donated produce from one garden is a fine summer harvest by anyone's standards. But still, when she learned the weight, she smiled and explained, "Potatoes and cucumbers weigh a lot."

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The story of the garden she helped to start dates back to 2013, when she and her husband, Deacon Phil, moved from St. Thomas More Parish in Chapel Hill, to Holy Cross Parish in Durham.

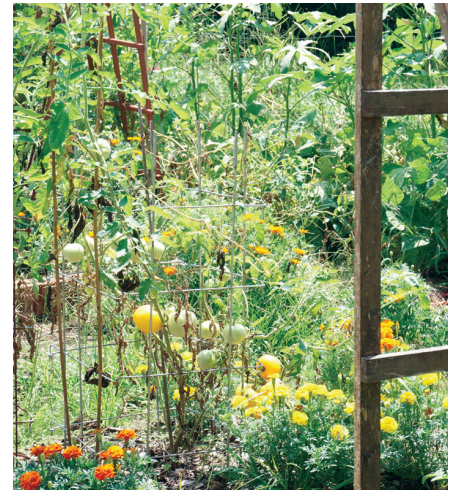
When they arrived, Mrs. Rzenwnicki was asked what she liked to do. She responded, "Well, I like gardening." Some of her fellow parishioners told her how they wanted to start a garden filled with crops to donate to Catholic Charities, but didn't know how. Mrs. Rzenwnicki was happy to help. In the span of a few

years, the garden grew from two beds to a large plot.

In its first year, the garden saw an excess of collards. But the exceeded growth meant that collards could be included in each Thanksgiving package that the church and Catholic Charities distributed to those in need in Durham.

These days, the parish grows enough produce to deliver a harvest to the Catholic Charities Durham office once a week. Every Tuesday, the group comes together to harvest that week's plants. And by Wednesday mornings Deacon Phil can be found driving the food to Catholic Charities.

For the past four years, the garden has consistently been expanding, all with the help and generosity of the community supporting its growth. For those involved in the Holy Cross Community Garden, shovels, spades and lots and lots of dirt are just part of the fun. When more



plant beds were needed, people came out and helped build them. When deer kept eating the sweet potatoes, a kind parishioner and retired farmer offered his old electric fence. When the group needed someone who knew how to use the electric fence, a Boy Scout Troop came out and helped set it up. In addition to the community support, a core group of six dedicated parishioners keeps the garden running.

The Holy Cross Community Garden offers beds to rent for \$25 a season, which lasts from January through November. Those who rent beds are also invited to assist with maintaining and harvesting the sharing beds. There's always something to be done in the garden. As Mrs. Rzenwnicki explained, "When you're out there working on your garden bed and you see a sharing bed that needs help, you work on that one too, and you divide your time. So everybody pitches in." For those looking to volunteer, Mrs. Rzenwnicki suggests that all they need to do is to show up. Bringing some gloves, a hat, and other gardening items is helpful, but extra

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assistance is always appreciated most.

In addition to its giving spirit, the garden places an emphasis on being sustainable in its practices. There is a compost bin for weeds and vegetable scraps. These left over items are then used as compost to fertilize the beds.

The group even recycled used bricks from a building project to create some of the beds. The garden also has flowers, which bring in beneficial insects and nutrients. They're also used for decoration in the church and charitable efforts at local shelters.

For those who aren't as keen on gardening or don't have a green thumb, there are other opportunities available at Holy Cross. There are liturgical ministries, a casserole ministry, and

a lovely quilting ministry that meets twice a month to piece together beautiful quilts that are given to those in shelters, long-term care facilities and hospitals.

No matter which of the charitable opportunities one chooses to pursue, they all carry the common theme of working to help others. †

CATHOLIC CHARITIES