

In Santa Barbara: How does your forest grow?

<http://the-tidings.com/2010/121010/garden.htm>

by Mike Nelson



*Op onze parochie Holy Cross Church Santa Barbara is een origineel project begonnen om de hongerigen te spijzigen. De lokale pers had er lovende artikels over. Dit artikel komt uit **The Tidings**, weekblad van het aartsbisdom.*

*Dans notre paroisse Holy Cross Church Santa Barbara un projet original a été mis en marche pour nourrir les affamés. La presse locale publiait des articles élogieux. Cet article vient du **The Tidings**, hebdomadaire de l'archidiocèse.*

What would the average parish do with two-thirds of an acre of precious land available? The wish lists, if put together, would likely run the length of the Ventura Freeway, from L.A. to Santa Barbara County.

Yet, at Holy Cross Church in precious-land-conscious Santa Barbara, their two-thirds of an acre was available for almost 50 years.

In recent years, however, there was some serious discussion about what to do with the trapezoidal space that had been a play area, and at times a staging area for construction in the neighborhood. Eventually, there came a solution which in recent weeks has taken shape.

On Dec. 5, the parish – located on a hill overlooking the Pacific on the west side of the city – celebrated the launch of its Mesa Harmony Garden, a community project that will soon benefit, well, everyone.



The project – which already included an existing vegetable garden – now encompasses a “food forest,” the first 30 trees of which were planted last Sunday and will, come spring, begin to produce a variety of produce that will be donated to the Santa Barbara County Food Bank’s “Backyard Bounty” program, which donated \$1,200 toward the purchase of more than 70 trees that will cover the area.

“The food these trees and plants produce will help feed the hungry and needy in the area, or wherever the needs are,” said Deacon Randy Saake, a co-founder of the project and secretary/treasurer of Mesa Harmony Garden. “It is our hope that others will use our garden as a model for future food gardens, and offer tips for homeowners, and businesses to make unused land productive and beautiful.”

Saake, along with Santa Barbara City College student Jan Cross, helped lead the effort to turn the available parish land into the garden/forest that – in addition to helping feeds the community with healthy fruits and vegetables – is incorporating ecologically and environmentally sound planting and growing techniques.

“We will be planting and growing this food-garden, using techniques of ancient Mayan, Chinese and modern Permaculture methods, in order to use as few resources as possible,” Saake explained. “Santa Barbara is a very environmentally and ecologically aware community, so we’ve dug berms and swales to capture the rainwater, in order to use as little city water as possible.”

“And, longterm, it shouldn’t need lots of maintenance, because we have done a tremendous amount of work up front in preparing the soil properly – mulch, then cardboard, then more mulch. The cardboard will help retain the moisture, and eventually break down and nourish the earth.”

Holy Cross also has applied for a \$10,000 grant that will help purchase a cistern to capture rainwater. The grant (actually, an “Intelligent use of Water” award) is being offered by *Rain-Bird* via an online voting contest that Holy Cross leads.

(To vote, visit <http://www.iuowawards.com/Projects.aspx#search>.)

The 44-year-old Saake, who operates a home repair business in addition to his duties at the parish, said that Josephite Father Ludo De Clippel, pastor, offered parishioners the chance to figure out how to use the empty land. After several starts and stops, the food forest idea took hold with the help of Cross and Larry Saltzman from the Permaculture Guild of Santa Barbara. Josh Kane (Mesa Harmony Garden president) and Renate Franquet (vice president) have also helped bring the project to, well, fruition.

Last Sunday, more than two dozen people from the parish and community – including 16 volunteers from Santa Barbara City College – joined to plant the initial group of fruit trees. “Five hours later, the Lord blessed us with a downpour of rain,” chuckled Saake. “I think the Lord likes what we’re going to do with his land.”



Holy Cross Santa Barbara: <http://www.rc.net/losangeles/holycross>