CHURCH COMMUNITY GARDENS: CASE STUDIES FROM DURHAM, NC

by

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Abstract

Studies have shown that community gardens address food insecurity, ecological concerns, and provide benefits to individuals and the community as a whole. Churches have become common sites for community gardens, yet few studies have investigated the particularity of church community gardens. I conducted qualitative case studies of five church community gardens in Durham, North Carolina. I explored why and how the gardens started and maintained the gardens and what influence the gardens have on their communities. I gathered data from interviews, observations, and material culture and analyzed the data using NVivo 9.

I identified six major motivations for church community gardens: community-building, ministry to neighbors, practicality (i.e. availability of land), creation care, beautification, and justice (i.e. food justice, alternative economy). The five gardens ranged from one to three years old. Most volunteers were church members; volunteer groups also played a vital role. All five gardens were organic. Most gardens developed programs around the actual work of gardening, including summer camps, workshops, and community events. Funding, in-kind support, and expert advice came from a variety of community organizations, including other gardens, other churches, NGOs, local businesses, and grant-making agencies. The biggest challenge was attracting volunteers. Despite a common challenge of involving neighbors in gardening, churches reported that gardens were successful in building community. The church gardens also provided food to people, although the number of beneficiaries and quantity was not quantified. Environmental and nutritional education occurred as a result of the garden. Environmental remediation and beautification was also reported. I noted that leaders and other participants had motivations and reflections on the theological significance of gardening beyond what they revealed as their initial motivations. These included a connection to Christian theology and scripture, connection to land, and economic implications.

By undertaking this exploratory case study of five church community gardens, I hoped to have provided a basic understanding of their motivations, logistics, and influence so that secular workers in environmental and social justice fields can build their awareness of Christian congregations who are participating in sustainable urban agriculture.
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I. Context

This exploratory study of church community gardens is important for several reasons. Participatory studies such as this one, Lovell (2010) suggests, are needed to determine “what institutions are involved [in urban agriculture] and in what capacity.”1 Exploring faith-based gardens enriches the understanding of the broader trend of community gardens across the country. This study also complements both theological scholarship and McDuff’s research by adding further case-based, practical application of theology in gardens.

I direct this study particularly toward those in the environmental and social justice fields in the secular sphere. Church community gardens have the potential to incorporate sustainable agriculture, environmental education, and eco-friendly land use with food equity and community building. Identifying and exploring the faith-based motivations of church community gardens presents a ripe opportunity for the environmental community to understand this growing area of ministry to build awareness of the engagement of faith groups with the environment and with their communities. I hope that insight into this and other case studies of church gardens may encourage partnership and solidarity between churches and secular groups, both in community garden work and in all pursuits toward sustainability.

Community gardens

Since the Industrial Revolution,2 especially in times of economic hardship, community gardens have sprung up as a way to provide food, particularly to the urban poor, but also to penny-pinching middle class families.3 A notable example is the prevalence of Victory Gardens during World War II. In 1944, 20 million gardeners grew 40% of the fresh vegetables consumed in the U.S.4 The popularity of individual and community gardens surged again in the 1970s inspired by the environmental conservation movement and a desire, mostly among young people, to “go back to the land.”5 We again find ourselves in a period where community gardens are popping up across the country. The motivations for and benefits of contemporary community gardens have received

1 Lovell (2010), 2514.
2 Lovell (2010), 2501. Lovell describes the transition to industrialized, “production-oriented” agriculture that “neglect[s]” agriculture’s other important functions and separates agriculture from city life.
3 Armstrong (2000).
5 Urban Agriculture Policy Plan, 22.
attention from the fields of social science, public health, and psychology. Presented through case studies, this research provides a perspective on a growing trend in American cities and suburbs.⁶

The studies of community gardens support Lovell’s statement that urban community gardens are “multifunctional” and have numerous benefits to society.⁷ Community gardens efficiently provide food to urban and suburban populations with limited access.⁸ In addition, as Lovell summarizes,

“urban agriculture [including community gardens] offers a wide range of ecological functions (e.g., biodiversity, nutrient cycling, and micro-climate control) and cultural functions (e.g., recreation, cultural heritage, and visual quality) that benefit the nearby community and society as a whole”. ⁹

Other studies cite motivations of improving mental health,¹⁰ connecting with neighbors,¹¹ growing culturally appropriate food,¹² and cost savings¹³ as motivations for community gardening. Community garden management practices are generally covered as part of studies on motivation and benefits.¹⁴ However, Glover et al. (2005) address the importance of securing resources for successful gardens in a study focused on community garden management, and Kurtz (2001) connects the physical structure of gardens (that is, the mechanism and extent of enclosure) to the roles they play in neighborhoods.

Of course, achieving the benefits of community gardening are often the same as the gardeners’ motivations. However, here I will distinguish between motivations and benefits in order to highlight the unintended benefits of community gardens that some researchers have indentified. Teig et al. (2009) describe gardens’ ability to promote “collective efficacy”; that is, the social processes encouraged by gardens that reinforce healthy lifestyles. These processes include social connections, reciprocity, mutual trust, collective decision-making, social norms, and civic engagement. Teig et al. (2009) conclude that these processes are made possible by the volunteerism, leadership, and

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⁶ Community gardens do exist in rural areas; however, this study will focus on those in suburbs and urban areas.
⁸ Lovell (2010), 2500.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Armstrong (2000) found that people in upstate New York participated in community gardening for mental health benefits (322). Although she does not specify, presumably these were highly functioning people who faced stress, minor anxiety or depression. However, community gardens are also a mechanism to rehabilitate addicts and criminal offenders (Taylor 2011).
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
recruitment activity in gardens as well as neighborhood organization.\textsuperscript{15} Teig et al. (2009) found that these processes encourage cooperation between gardeners outside the garden and have the potential to affect positive change on the wider community.\textsuperscript{16}

Glover et al. (2005) indicated that the social relationships formed in community gardens are like “social lubricant for social capital production.”\textsuperscript{17} Social capital is the potential power of having networks of individuals, whereby it “makes it possible to achieve certain aims that cannot be achieved by individuals alone in its absence”.\textsuperscript{18} This social capital not only mobilizes resources for the gardens themselves, but also makes possible other action to better neighborhoods and beyond. Social capital is formed not only by gardening tasks themselves, but also by the “peripheral” activities to gardens (grant-seeking, community cookouts, etc.). As Glover states, “community gardens are less about gardening than they are about community”.\textsuperscript{19}

**Church community gardens**

As the many websites that result from an Internet search for church community gardens indicates, church community gardens are an emerging church ministry, though they are hardly ubiquitous or valued by all congregations.\textsuperscript{20} In a 2010 list of community gardens in Durham, North Carolina, almost 30% are church gardens.\textsuperscript{21} While little academic research addresses the particularity of church community gardens, the President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships acknowledges the importance of their presence: “More and more faith-based organizations see the connections between their values and sustainable food systems. Community and congregational gardens are sprouting up on the religious institutions’ property around the country.” Lovell (2010) also notes that “churchyards” are coming to serve as hosts for urban agriculture.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{15} Teig et al (2009)
\textsuperscript{16} Teig (2009), 1121.
\textsuperscript{17} Glover (2005), 450.
\textsuperscript{18} Putnam, 2000 in Glover et al. (2005).
\textsuperscript{19} Glover et al (2005), 454.
\textsuperscript{20} <https://www.google.com/search?q=church+community+garden&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>. I have found no sources approximating the number of church gardens in the U.S. or the increase of church gardens over time. I know only anecdotally that in Durham, as in other parts of the country, church gardens have increased over the last three to five years.
\textsuperscript{21} Grow and Share (2010).
\textsuperscript{22} President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (2010).
\textsuperscript{23} Lovell (2010), 2508.
Secular community gardens managed by non-profit groups, local governments, schools, universities, and community associations have likely encouraged, in part, church gardens. One should also look to a growing canon of theological thought within the Christian community to explain the prevalence of church gardens. Agrarian writers like Wendell Berry, who describe a vision of a harmonious relationship between land, animals, and people, have inspired Christians to further explore how their faith practices reflect this vision. Numerous theologians have suggested that just and sustainable agriculture, and even keeping a garden (a sustainably managed one) is at the crux of many Christian values described in the Bible: communion with God in creation, care for creation and the poor, building and supporting community, extending hospitality to neighbors, practicing humility about human power, inspiring gratitude for the blessing of food, and promoting a just economy.

In the only published case studies of church community gardens I have found, McDuff (2010) places church gardens in the context of Christian “faithful environmentalism”. She describes how two Christian feeding ministries “integrate the environment into food and faith”. While she focuses on the “spiritual act of feeding”, she also mentions the themes of food justice, teaching “life skills” to youth, the formation of relationships through gardening, and education about simpler living as part of church garden ministries.

Complementing the theological support for gardens, Cooper claims in A Philosophy of Gardens that the significance of gardens goes beyond aesthetics but involves the installation of virtue, “strength of character, philosophical anthropology, and (ultimately) theology.” Significant themes in what Cooper interprets as the theological aspects of gardens are the integration of (or co-creation by) humans, natural materials, and the elements; the mysterious giftedness of the garden and its creatures and the world; and how the garden is an “epiphany” of this gift. Though not explicitly Christian, Cooper’s philosophy coordinates well with Christian theologians.

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24 Shuman and Owens (2009).
25 e.g. Bahnson (2007); Davis (2009); MacGillis (1994); Wirzba (2007); Wirzba (2011).
26 I adapted a subtitle of her Introduction “The Growth of Faithful Environmentalists” to describe her project in describing how Christians are contributing to efforts toward living within the bounds of ecology, i.e. sustainability.
27 McDuff (2010), 33.
28 Ibid., 34, 37, 41, 44.
Durham, North Carolina

This general overview of Durham sets the stage for the case studies of church community gardens that will follow. With a population of about 270,000, the city of Durham sits in central North Carolina between the larger cities of Raleigh and Greensboro. Durham was the epicenter of the tobacco wealth created by the Washington Duke family, for which the local Duke University is named, in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Since the decline of tobacco farming and tobacco product manufacturing in the mid-20th century, Durham has become known not only for its universities (Duke and North Carolina Central) but also as a concentrated laboratory for scientific research. Durham has also emerged as a local food mecca of sorts, and weekly farmers markets and quirky, locally sourced restaurants are popular among residents. As one journalist reports,

“… hundreds of outlying acres of rich Piedmont soil have “transitioned” from tobacco, and now sprout peas, strawberries, fennel, artichokes and lettuce. Animals also thrive in the gentle climate, giving chefs access to local milk, cheese, eggs, pigs, chickens, quail, lambs and rabbits.”

However, underneath the vibrant local food culture is the presence of poverty and hunger. Just over 16 percent of residents are below the poverty line, and food deserts flank the central city (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of Durham, North Carolina. Regions identified as food deserts are shaded. Circled areas indicate the regions of study sites. Source: USDA Economic Research Service.

31 U.S. Census Bureau.
32 Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau.
33 Moskin (2010).
34 U.S. Census Bureau.
Objectives

In this study, I asked:

• *why* five churches in Durham, North Carolina founded and maintain their gardens (i.e. their initial motivations)
• *how* the churches garden (i.e. their practices and activities)
• *what influence* the churches have had on their communities

By investigating these questions, I hope to:

• understand the motivations, operations, and benefits of the church gardens I studied;
• articulate their missions, values, and contribution of church gardens to a secular audience;
• expand to broader conclusions about church community gardens; and
• facilitate further understanding and partnership between church gardens and secular groups.

II. Methodology

Case study tradition of inquiry

Following numerous other studies of community gardens, this qualitative study borrows from the comparative case study tradition of inquiry. I participated in various activities of five church community gardens from May through September 2011. During that time, I collected data from interviews, observations, and material culture.

Participation

I chose to actively participate in the church community gardens I was studying for several reasons. I thought my involvement would build trust between me and the gardeners from the churches and neighborhoods. I remained an outsider in that I joined church garden communities for the purpose of research, yet I desired for the community to regard me as a friend and insider of sorts. Also, I saw my labor and support as a return for their agreement to participate in the study. Finally, I had a personal interest in learning how to garden, and wanted my personal experience in gaining knowledge of gardening, and I valued my personal insights as part of my data.

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35 Armstrong (2000); Baker (2004); Glover et al. (2005); Teig et al. (2009).
36 Interestingly, previous case studies of community gardens did not include material culture data.
The level of my participation in each garden varied. For example, St. Michael’s had frequent workdays and other garden events, whereas First Baptist did not have a regular volunteer schedule or garden programming. The other three church gardens fell somewhere in between. I had personal conflicts that meant I could not participate in all garden events, and sometimes multiple garden events conflicted with each other.  

Research with human subjects

The Duke University Office of Research Support approved my request for exemption from review on March 10, 2011. Per my protocol, I obtained verbal consent from gardeners I observed and written consent from interviewees. In this report, I will use pseudonyms for the names of churches consistent with the actual churches’ denominations and gender-appropriate pseudonyms for individuals, including interviewees.

Data collection

Selection of church community gardens

I defined a church community garden as a garden supported and maintained by a Christian church necessarily producing some combination of consumable fruits, vegetables, and herbs and possibly producing flowers and other plants. I focused my study by choosing gardens in the urban regions of Durham. My residence in Durham made local churches the easiest to access regularly, and I already had knowledge of local culture and history. I was particularly interested in church community gardens in urban and suburban areas. Four of the gardens I studied are located in urban neighborhoods in Durham; the remaining garden is a few miles from the city center.

Table 1 lists the gardens in the study. In choosing church gardens, I attempted to achieve a diversity of garden age, denomination, and church demographics. I began with the church garden, St. Michael’s (pseudonym) that I had researched as a pilot project to this study. Mary (pseudonym), co-manager of St. Michael’s garden, is quite knowledgeable about other church gardens in the area as she is a local resource for urban, organic agriculture. Beginning with Mary, I used a snowball technique to identify two other gardens suitable to my study. I contacted Mary’s recommended gardens via email. Wanting more diversity, I contacted another garden through a mutual contact.

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37 In the latter cases, I prioritized the garden where I had less participation.
38 See Figure 1 for a list of church gardens I studied.
39 See Appendix A for a sample recruitment letter.
To supplement these four gardens, I contacted an additional garden I found on a listing of community gardens in the region.\textsuperscript{40} I contacted several other gardens from this list, but did not receive a reply. Due to time constraints, I limited the study to five gardens.

Table 1: Churches, interviewees, and observations. Names of churches and interviewees are pseudonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Material culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy Spirit UMC</td>
<td>Leah, founder Mark, founder</td>
<td>Workdays (2)</td>
<td>Listserv correspondence Photographs Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Baptist</td>
<td>Carter, pastor</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Photographs Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Alban’s Episcopal</td>
<td>Anne, priest and founder/Samuel, gardener</td>
<td>Garden committee meeting (1) Workdays (2)</td>
<td>Listserv correspondence Photographs Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mark’s Presbyterian</td>
<td>Michelle, pastor Patty, founder</td>
<td>Garden party (1) Garden committee meeting (1) Workdays (1) Workshops (1)</td>
<td>Listserv correspondence Photographs Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Michael’s Episcopal</td>
<td>David, priest Mary, founder Ron, co-manager</td>
<td>Community dinners/workdays (5) Workdays (7)</td>
<td>Community reflections Grant proposals Listserv correspondence Photographs Website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured interviews

Based on the time constraints of my study, I prioritized interviews with garden managers and the clergy involved in the garden ministries. A larger study could get the perspectives of garden volunteers and other community members. When I received a positive response from a recruitment email, I would follow up with a request for an interview with the recipient. In some cases, I had in mind others at each church garden I wished to interview; in others, the first interviewee recommended other garden leaders to interview.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. Interview length ranged from 37 to 54 minutes. Most interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ respective churches; some were conducted at coffee shops and restaurants in Durham. I recorded all but one interview (Carter) for transcription and analysis. Carter preferred that his interview not be recorded, so I took notes by hand and later transferred them to a Word document I could upload and analyze.

There were several common themes in the interviews, outlined in an interview guide (Appendix B). The interviews first inquired why and under what circumstances the gardens were

\textsuperscript{40} Grow and Share (2010).
founded. I often pressed to see if interviewees could identify faith-based motivations and why they thought gardens were appropriate activities for churches. When interviewing clergy members, I asked if they integrate the garden ministry into the rest of church life. I obtained specifics about garden practices, including leadership and volunteer management, crops grown, distribution, programming, sustainability, and adaptations to an urban context. I asked whether the interviewee thought gardening had shaped, or had the potential to shape, environmental ethics of gardeners and church congregations. I inquired about other benefits of their gardens, particularly in their urban contexts. Finally, I asked about challenges of church gardens and prompted the interviewee’s to suggest solutions.

In each interview, I kept to the general themes in the guide, since those questions were driving my research. However, I did not present interview questions identically for every interviewee and spontaneously amended and omitted questions. My deviation from the interview guide was, first, based on the interviewee’s time constraints and the flow of their answers. I was also conscious of my relationship with the interviewee, and altered the wording of my original questions to best suit the individuals I interviewed.

**Observations**

My “observations” were actually reflections on my experiences participating in gardening and related activities. Observation events included garden workdays, garden meetings, parties, workshops, and community dinners (Table 1). Observation events were chosen based on the church’s offering of these events and my ability to attend them. I did not go to garden alone; other participants had to be present. At St. Alban’s, for example, I could have volunteered to water the plants once a week, but I chose to restrict my participation to activities where others were present. I did this, first, because my research questions aimed at the communal nature of church gardening. Secondly, I wanted to reduce the direct effect I had on the success of the church gardens. In this case, I thought for the garden to be solely dependent on me would detract from my “outsider” impression of the functioning the garden.

*Workdays*, which occurred in four of the five gardens over the course of my study, were times when community members would gather at the garden to perform tasks like planting, weeding, harvesting, and general maintenance. I participated in these as much as my schedule allowed during my data collection time period. I contributed to whatever work needed to be done, working alone on a task or as part of a team. I occasionally made handwritten notes during garden workdays, but I
did not want my observation to interfere with my participation in and contribution to the garden. Taking photographs helped to quickly document events or stories to later jog my memory of the experience and provide additional data for analysis. I made mental notes of gardening tasks, especially eco-friendly practices; personal interactions between gardeners and between gardeners and neighbors (passers-by), including conversations and group tasks; and the general emotion of the group (fun, hard work, tired, friendly, etc.) When I got home from the workday, I spent 30 minutes writing down everything I could remember from the workday in a research journal. While I likely lost some data because I did not remember it, this was the balance I thought appropriate between participation and data collection.

Meetings about the gardens did not occur often during the time I was collecting data. I attended two of these and took handwritten notes of the discussion and proceedings. I later typed the notes for upload and analysis.

Other garden-related activities included St. Mark’s garden party, at which community members and gardeners gathered for a potluck dinner, music, and a tour of the garden. St. Mark’s also gave workshops on garden-related topics. I attended one such workshop on cooking with summer vegetables. I attended five of the seven “community dinners” at St. Michael’s, where volunteers prepared dinner for church and community members, which was served family style on tables set up beside the garden. Like I did for workdays, I took mental notes of significant elements (and occasionally made a hand-written note) and then wrote for 30 minutes about the event once the event was over.

Material culture

I collected material culture in various media from each church garden. I took photographs at each garden. Only a few photographs depict people; in those that do, the people are unidentifiable. While images of gardeners would further illustrate the experience of church community gardens, I found the consent process (a form signed before each photo) too awkward and time consuming. Instead, I chose to photograph other elements of the gardens and reflect the human component in my observation notes and interviews.

Other material culture items included news clippings, websites, and blog posts, documents (grant reports, garden plans, drawings, workshop handouts, community reflections, church bulletins, etc.), and email correspondence to the gardens’ listservs. I also included the Christian religious text (i.e. the Bible) as material culture.
Analysis

I used NVivo 9, a computer software program for qualitative analysis, to analyze the data. I input all the data into NVivo 9 and coded it according to themes I created. I organized the coding into themes and subthemes to identify patterns and relationships in the data.41 I created a model of themes describing the motivations for the gardens (Figure 2). Using matrix coding queries, I compared the themes and subthemes coded in the sources collected from each church garden.

III. Results

Motivation

Overview of motivations

Using the node collecting references to motivation, a model was created in NVivo to display the main motivations and their subthemes (Figure 2). I also created a chart showing the number of churches coded to each motivation (Figure 3). The following discussion will elaborate on these findings and provide data samples to exemplify these themes.

41 Bazeley (2007).
Figure 2: Model of motivation for church gardens created in NVivo. The “motivation node” was the parent, or main, node used to collect data describing motivation. The boxes in the center were subthemes to motivation, and the boxes on the far right further describe motivation themes. The blue dots indicate that NVivo has created the model using data coding.
Figure 3: Frequency of motivations for gardens. Major themes are labeled in capital letters. Sub-themes are color coded to major themes.
Community building

All five gardens expressed the motivation of fostering community. Some churches expressed their initial interest in providing fellowship for church members:

We dreamt of having a community experience together, and if the garden became its own little congregation, that that would be wonderful, because that shows that there’s the commitment to one another, a sense of belonging to a particular place and a particular people.  

Another major theme was fostering community with neighbors who did not attend the churches:

The garden was started as a way to meet our neighbors in downtown Durham…we have invited them to work the garden with us, hoping that by working side by side we would develop relationships.

Several garden founders said they wanted to create “community space.”

Ministry to neighbors

All five churches also expressed the motivation of serving the neighboring communities to their churches. This was often expressed as a ministry of fresh produce, particularly in underserved areas. Holy Spirit UMC wanted to supplement their food pantry ministry with fresh fruits and vegetables:

A few years ago, we realized we were getting less fresh food from the food bank. It was mostly canned or boxed or frozen. So we found some other sources of produce….It was probably around that time that we started talking about having a garden as another source of produce.

A motivation shared by three churches was “radical hospitality.”

I think the arms-wide-open welcome of the garden, unexpected in the midst of our busy urban setting, creates a subtle change in us all—parishioners and neighbors. We all feel a part of the giving and the receiving.

One case in point is the gates. We decided to build gates and never close them. Because an open gate is even more inviting than not gate at all.

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42 Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
43 Newsletter, St. Michael’s Episcopal
44 Leah, Holy Spirit UMC
45 Newsletter, St. Michael’s Episcopal
46 Ron, St. Michael’s Episcopal
Some churches targeted specific subsets of the population. Four out of five churches expressed the motivation of involving youth in the garden as a creative outlet, learning opportunity, or play. First Baptist’s garden focuses on ministry to the elderly in their congregation by reducing the amount of canned food they eat.

**Practical**

All five churches expressed a practical reason for wanting to being their gardens. Availability of land was a common theme to all.

> Land is something churches have.⁴⁷

> …looking around all the time and saying, “we’re tiny, but we have this land. What can we do with it? How will we…make meaning out of our location here?”⁴⁸

Anne and Samuel at St. Alban’s Episcopal said they wanted to “use the land for good.”

Gardens were coded to three minor sub-themes. Two gardens wanted to use the garden for evangelism and to attract members:

> We’re always trying to open these [church] doors to the neighborhood. I always pray about opening these doors on a Wednesday night for summer and the Eucharist or Compline or something.⁴⁹

Only one garden was started as a way to earn income for the church.

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⁴⁷ Carter, First Baptist
⁴⁸ Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
⁴⁹ Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal
I just really wanted to help a little bit with the income of the church, ‘cause we’re such a small church and we were struggling financially. And I thought, well that would help. And maybe from there it would grow.  

While St. Mark’s does charge a membership fee to garden participants, this motivation has been tempered by the stronger motivation of building community. For example, instead of setting up individual boxes for rent, the garden is gardened in communal beds.

Finally, three churches expressed the desire to provide a place for people to garden.

As more and more people live downtown in urban settings, they don’t always have a little pot or something.

My thing was that I just felt like it would be a good thing, and it would bring in the community for people, who didn’t have gardens and wanted some place to garden.

**Beautification**

Several gardens were explicit in recalling their motivation to beautify the neighborhood. I also inferred a motivation of beautification by the garden designs. Several gardens planted curvilinear rows, added decorative elements, or planted flowers in their gardens.

![Figure 5: Implicit motivation of beautifying the area. a) Curvilinear row planting, decorative fencing, and gate indicates concern with aesthetics (St. Michael's); b) Hand-painted signs line the garden visible from the road (Holy Spirit).](image)

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50 Patty, St. Mark’s Presbyterian  
51 Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal  
52 Patty, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
Creation care

Creation care is a way Christians express “environmentalism,” “conservation,” or “sustainability.” They often choose “creation care” over these other, secular terms because “creation care” alludes to the Creator God, the foundation of their faith and their motivation for work protecting “the environment.” One source spoke of relating to the earth and healing a broken creation:

“God created us out of dust, so I’m made out of this stuff, so how can I make it whole and healthy in a place that’s fractured and broken?”

Another source exemplified the common theology stewardship of creation:

“I feel in the—especially in the Old Testament, God says a lot about our responsibility to tend the earth, to care for the earth, and that the earth will yield the harvest if we work it, and, but I feel that most people today are totally out of touch with that, so I’m trying—I hope that we’re raising awareness.”

Still another represented the desire to instill a love of creation. Finally, one clergy member described the garden as the answer to the question “how do we as a community of faith respond to [the environmental crisis]?” (David, St. Michael’s Episcopal).

I identified two minor themes, environmental education and sustainable agriculture, within “creation care.” Both were minimally expressed as initial motivations but are worth noting.

Although only four gardens were coded to an initial motivation of creation care, sources from the remaining garden spoke about a desire to “use the land for good” and to “work the land.” Because these sentiments were developed in on-going reflection about the garden and not in describing founding motivations, I did not code these statements to “creation care.”

Perhaps due to my perspective as an environmental student and advocate, I anticipated that creation care would dominate the motivations for church community gardens. However, the data revealed that although four out of five churches said it was a motivation, it was second to community-building or ministry to neighbors. One garden founder said explicitly, “environment would definitely come in second.” Another source said the garden is “not just about creation care,” exemplifying that creation care is integrated into the ministry along with other motivations.

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53 Mark, Holy Spirit UMC
54 Leah, Holy Spirit UMC
I think this is just going to spin into other directions and how we can preserve creation and not throw so much away and we share and preserve everything that we can.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Justice}

I defined justice as the motivation of explicitly addressing social inequality and economic systems and so distinguished it from ministry to neighbors or community building. Participating in an alternative economy was one expression of the justice motivation.

So creating a community garden in a low-income neighborhood, in a sense, we hope to undercut some of \textit{[the food justice issue]} and to kind of imagine a new economy in the midst of an economy that uproots people from the land and creatures dependencies that disempower.

Not just a provider for people, but also help people have ownership over, learn how to grow their own food, and not be dependent on the Walmarts of the world.\textsuperscript{56}

Sources also tied the pursuit of justice to religious convictions:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Jesus spent his life on earth talking with the disadvantaged.}\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Logistics}

\textbf{Age}

The five gardens are relatively new, functional from between 1 and 3 years (Table 2).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Church} & \textbf{Founding year} \\
\hline
Holy Spirit UMC & 2009 \\
First Baptist & 2011 \\
St. Alban’s Episcopal & 2011 \\
St. Mark’s Presbyterian & 2009 \\
St. Michael’s Episcopal & 2009 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Church gardens and founding years}
\end{table}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal
\item \textsuperscript{56} Mark, Holy Spirit UMC
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ron, St. Michael’s Episcopal
\end{itemize}
Volunteers

The largest component of volunteers is church members (Figure 6). Volunteer groups also play a large role in the gardening tasks. One garden reported that at least 200 people participated in their garden through church, business, and school volunteer activities independent from the church sponsoring the garden. In other words, helping church gardens are opportunities for community service. The “volunteers” subcategory differentiates from the “immediate neighbors” in that “volunteers” are individuals that participate in the garden but neither attend the church nor live near the garden. The lack of immediate neighbor involvement will be addressed in the “Challenges” section below.

![Bar chart showing frequency of sub-themes]

Figure 6: Volunteers: frequency of sub-themes

“Green” practices

I was particularly interested in the presence of environmentally friendly practices in the church gardens. Figure 7 indicates universal organic practice, meaning no use of pesticide or synthetic fertilizer (compost, manure, and mineral additives were used.)
Figure 7: Green practices: frequency of sub-themes.

The gathering and dispersal of water is a particular challenge. Water catchments do not supply the quantity required for the gardens. Gardens without drip irrigation water by hand with a hose or buckets, which is time-consuming and likely uses more water, though I did not collect quantitative data on water use. Three gardens compost their own garden waste, but one compost system was full during the workdays I attended, and garden waste was sent to the trash. While all pest management is organic, I observed two gardens using companion planting (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Examples of natural pest deterrents: a) A rope with flags and waving bags deters deer (First Baptist); b) marigolds are planted with tomatoes to deter insect pests (St. Mark’s).
Funding and support

*Expertise*: Gardens rely on in-house and outside expertise on the range of garden tasks and planning (Figure 9). The agricultural extension agent was used for soil testing. NGOs provide workshops and informal advice to gardens. Equal to the frequency of in-house expertise is the word-of-mouth support of gardens to each other. For example, the founder and co-manager of St. Michael’s garden designed and oversaw the installation of the garden at St. Alban’s, as well as donated seedlings.

![Figure 9: Expertise: Frequency of sub-themes.](image)

*Funding*. Funding is obtained in a variety of ways. As mentioned before, only one church has a fee-based model. Grants have largely come from foundations. Fundraising (non-grant) includes community-sponsored events, such as a portion of one night’s profit from a restaurant.
In-kind donations: All five churches received in-kind donations from various sources. These donations included soil, plants, supplies, irrigation system, greenhouse, and lumber as well as the use of tractors and a lumber mill. I included labor of city employees as an in-kind donation since their work was done as part of a partnership between one garden and the city.

Programs and activities
All but one garden hosted workdays to draw church and community members together for garden tasks. The remaining church relied on a more informal system of gardening. I discovered that these
church gardens were about more than gardening; a variety of activities emerged from the existence of the garden (Figure 12). The summer camps ranged from working in the garden to cooking with garden vegetables. The workshops sponsored by one church spanned cooking to the importance of bees. The presence at a community fair consisted of advertising the garden (which was just around the corner from the fair) and handing out samples of cooked greens. One garden hosted community dinners for church members and neighbors outside beside the garden.

![Figure 12: Garden practices and activities: frequency of subthemes.](image)

**Challenges**

As seen in Figure 14, a variety of challenges were reported in the data.

![Figure 13: Challenges: frequency of subthemes.](image)
Recruiting volunteers was the most frequent challenge. While all gardens had some volunteer activity, several reported that the majority of the work was done by two to five people, usually those who founded the garden. David at St. Michael’s presented a realistic view:

The challenge is the time it takes to cultivate a garden. I mean you really have to spend time, it has to be an ongoing thing, and you know, the reality is that people are busy.  

The most concern was voiced over the failure of the gardens to attract community as was hoped.

We had a vision of making a community garden, and I’d say widely that didn’t work out. And because there, the other area around the church was largely zoned commercial or light industrial, there wasn’t a lot of foot traffic, people in the neighborhood coming through there. And it was really hard to create ownership of the garden in the communities. So a long story short is that you can’t really call it a community garden because a true fortified community garden will have shares that people would own, or they would own a local plot in the garden, and you would have folks from the neighborhood coming in and working on the garden a daily or weekly basis. And that never really happened.

Our immediate neighbors aren’t interested. And the people who are interested in these kind of healthy food, in touch with the land stuff, don’t tend to live where we do. And then the people who really need food don’t tend to live in our area.

These concerns led to struggles to live into, or redefine, the gardens’ missions.

Although they were mostly minor, sources reported “gardening challenges,” including planting too late, weather (too hot or rainy) cancelling workdays, pest management, and logistics. I either heard or observed some challenge in pursuing sustainability practices in gardens.

It turns out that the rain barrel does not give enough pressure for watering, as an attempt to get more pressure by elevating it was unsuccessful.

Problems with the drip irrigation system also meant increased watering by hand.

Funding did not come frequently as a challenge; gardens have larger up-front costs but then are self-maintaining. Two churches specifically mentioned the challenge of an urban context, including theft (this could, of course, happen in a rural context, but given the easy access to the gardens from the street, sources attributed theft to being downtown); and the somewhat humorous

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58 David, St. Michael’s Episcopal
59 Mark, Holy Spirit UMC
60 Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
61 Leah, Holy Spirit UMC
challenge of finding “urban artifacts” in the tomato bushes and compost pile, including bottles of alcohol and bags of clothes. Finally, the challenge of zoning was only expressed once regarding the need for a storage shed and a garden sign.

Influence
I identified five major themes of influence, or outcomes, from the church gardens (Figure 14).

![Figure 14: Influence and frequency of coding.]

Community building

Corresponding to community building as a strong motivator, and despite the challenge of creating community through church gardens, all five churches reported some level of community engagement. Conversation, enjoyment, teamwork, and discovery of gifts in the community specifically contributed to the sense of community building among the churches.

Hard and boundary-crossing conversations are possible in the garden.62

Those of us tending the garden have had wonderful experiences of meeting our neighbors who stop by to share a story or rest a while.63

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62 Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
63 St. Michael’s reflection
Engaging children was also an important outcome.

I really loved... when that little girl came, I think she was about 7. And yesterday she was so happy, she had her hands on her hips, just smiling, and she said “I believe my sunflowers are comin’ up.” Really sweet. Really sweet.  

Intergenerational experiences were a related sub-theme. Through gardening, cooking, and storytelling, children interacted with elderly people. The traditional skills of past generations (especially food preservation) were celebrated. On several occasions, young or middle-aged people told stories about their grandparents’ gardens or meals.

Food and health

Since it may not be guaranteed, I report that all the gardens produced food! The beneficiaries of the garden’s produce depended on the garden’s mission, location, and relationship to other charity groups (Figure 13). It is likely that church members and gardeners benefited in all gardens, although my data only reflects three. Also, I was not able to confirm the benefit to neighbors in the other gardens since many of them are open to the public and are not monitored. The school staff and students refer to the school where one of the gardens is located. Many of the students are part of a program to provide produce to children who may not have sufficient food over the weekend and holidays. The same garden donates produce to a culinary school for ex-offenders. The garden motivated by serving the elderly reported that they “yielded five times” and gave the harvests to the seniors of the church.

64 Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal
65 First Baptist.
I also coded under the “food and health” outcome the reduction of stress, reported by one gardener.

I know that a lot of other people that have a lot of stress, that it would be good for them, too, ’cause it is, it’s good therapy.  

Education

I coded as “education” any outcome that educated community members specifically on environment, food, or health. Workshops certainly provided education experiences for participants on specific skills; informal education also occurred; workdays and other community events provided informal settings for education. For example, I overheard Michelle talking to a young girl at a workday about the importance of earthworms for gardens. At another workday, some gardeners informed another about how to use arugula in cooking (she had not heard of it before.) I also included in “education” conversations inspired by the garden that brought awareness to important topics.

One of our members, a young guy, African-American, really looks healthy on the outside, and he said that working in the garden has helped him appreciate that what he puts into his body is just as important as all the exercise and stuff, and wasn’t raised on a lot of fruits and vegetables, so he’s done a little bit of testifying in front of the congregation about that, and that’s been, that’s started up some healthy conversation.

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66 Patty, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
67 Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
Environment

Several sources counted the garden as an improvement to the environmental health of their locations. This source alludes to the garden’s porous surface as beneficial to stormwater drainage and to the increased biodiversity now possible in downtown. (I also saw a praying mantis, a garden spider, and a snake during my observations.)

There was runoff before when we have a nice little parking lot, but we’ve got bees and worms down there now.68

Two sources attribute greater awareness of larger environmental issues to the garden.

I think if the garden began because people felt somewhat concerned about the environment and they sought the garden as a way to engage in that issue, at least at a local level, I think therefore the activity of the garden will only put it more and more in front of it and allow for people to become more aware.69

And the whole thing about composting to enrich the soil is something that [takes space] and to get the water thing hooked up to the downspout so that we’re using rainwater. Makes you think about every resource possible... All kinda connected.70

The gardens have inspired further “green” practices.

It’s been since the garden’s been created that we’re now doing [things like] this environmental series we’re doing this Lenten season. It’s since we’ve been doing the garden that we’ve made sure that we’re now using, that we’re not necessarily using paper products, but that we’re using dishes that can be washed. And when we have a gathering, people are encouraged to bring their own utensils and not just use disposable stuff. And that’s because of the garden.71

Two churches raised the difficulty of translating gardening to sustainability. One interviewee pointed out that “it’s hard to make [environmental] issues relevant to people who are struggling to survive.” An interview from another church revealed that people at her church are not particularly environmentally-minded, whereas at other churches people already garden with that sympathy.

68 Ron, St. Michael’s Episcopal.
69 David, St. Michael’s Episcopal
70 Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal.
71 David, St. Michael’s Episcopal.
Beautification

Whether gardens achieved beautification of their neighborhoods is subjective. One garden did receive an award from the city for “community appearance.” Especially in downtown areas, the gardens are a striking contrast to the urban landscape (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Examples of gardens' aesthetic impact on urban and suburban landscapes.

Spiritual experience

Sources expressed that they felt “close to God” in nature or experienced a kind of peace. One garden’s initial challenges was also interpreted as spiritual formation:

And it’s been challenging just working the garden because we started with very poor soil, and I think that’s probably good for us, in that we didn’t have instant success, and that we have to wait and give it time and nurture the soil, so I think it’s been a very good spiritual experience, but it was challenging.\(^2\)

Further reflection

Another outcome I identified was a blossoming of further reflections, which can be understood as continuing and developing motivations for the church gardens. These were thoughts, desires, observations, connections, and motivations not reflected in their identification of their initial motivations, but those that have developed with experience in the garden. One source expressed this phenomenon:

\(^2\) Mary, St. Michael’s Episcopal.
The possibilities are endless for what you can do with food from a garden. Teach people about eating right, eating on a budget. Not throwing things away, composting, sharing, extending the radical welcome to everyone.\textsuperscript{73}

My intention for the research was to identify the initial motivations and founding stories of church gardens. However, a fuller picture of motivations may emerge when considering the continued and developing motivations and how the garden inspires them. Thus full investigation of these outcomes is outside the scope of this study, but I will provide a basic outline of what the data revealed to inform future investigation (Table 3).

Table 3: Themes in further reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy food</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to food and food production</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of society</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reflecting on these themes, they then become part of the church’s motivation for the garden. For example, this source offered a critique of society’s disconnection:

| I think we’re texting each other too much. Communication. Human to human. I mean even the high school kids, I mean they’re in the same room and they’re texting. I mean someday we’re gonna be having babies that don’t have mouths. You know! No vocal chords, we’re just going to have big thumbs and fingers. Cause it’s sad. They just sit in the same room and text each other, I’m like, can’t you just speak? And we don’t do it, we’re losing that. The human touch.\textsuperscript{74} |

This was not part of her response to why her church has a garden, but she went on to say that the garden is a way to recover the “human touch.” This seems, then, a developing motivation for her.

Scripture and theology. Another theme within the further self-reflection of church gardens I highlight briefly here is the blossoming of connections to Christian theology, including specific Biblical references, made after the garden is begun (Table 4). I was surprised by the lack of explicitly

\textsuperscript{73} Anne and Samuel, St. Alban’s Episcopal.

\textsuperscript{74} Patty, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
theological (initial) motivations expressed by the church gardens but saw that they filled out significantly when I included later thoughts.

Table 4: Theological themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garden analogy to faith or in Scripture</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to land</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human vocation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Service to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and justice</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church’s mission as witness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>Creation care</td>
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<td>Faithful living</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as tithing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some churches brought out contemporary issues of agriculture from the Bible.

[The Biblical book of] Amos uses a lot of agricultural metaphors to talk about sin and redemption, and so we did a lot of thinking about land in a bigger sense… Amos helped us to make connections to the bigger picture of agriculture in the United States, the way that we’re abusing the land and abusing workers, and since Amos is talking about that pretty directly, it was an easy connection to make, to say that this is part of the reason that we garden is that you can’t begin to love people until you can love land. That’s something that Amos kind of talks about is that the way you treat land is the way you treat people. But that also the way we treat land is the way we treat people because we made some connections between the modern agricultural system and all the people who are dying serving our food and our whole food culture. 

Others illuminated garden analogies to faith and Jesus’ use of agrarian images in his parables. Analogies were also made between the garden and the journey of faith.

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75 Michelle, St. Mark’s Presbyterian
Finally, in speaking about the garden, some churches considered theologically the human place in the environment.

I think Western civilization has been objectifying creation and becoming, our lives become abstracted from the land. So that we become in a sense, we take over that difference between God and creation. We place ourselves in the position of God and become other than creation. Theologically we are part of the creation. We are not God. And I think when we make that move of trying to leap the divide between God and creation, then you end up doing violence to creation, you end up breaking the creation in a way that tries to reorder and uproot it from the way that God has created it to be.

IV. Discussion

By undertaking this exploratory case study of five church community gardens, I hope to have provided a basic understanding of their motivations, logistics, and influence so that secular workers in environmental and social justice fields can build their awareness of Christian congregations who are participating in sustainable urban agriculture. From the flurry of data I have presented, I suggest the following synthesized conclusions.

The church community gardens surveyed reveal a variety of motivations, practices, and influences. It is important to note that church gardens are not monolithic and universal; their stories depend on their contexts.

Although environmentalism per se was not the primary motivation (indeed, in some cases it was explicitly secondary), these church gardens demonstrated how the themes of community-building, food ministry, justice, beauty integrate with, and are even dependent on, “creation care.” The church gardens largely conformed to Glover’s assessment that community-building motivations, rather than gardening itself or other “environmental” motivations, drives community gardens. Community-building and ministry to neighbors were frequent motivations and outcomes for the gardens; community involvement beyond the congregation is evident from the outside sources of funding.

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76 Carter, First Baptist.
77 Mark, Holy Spirit UMC.
78 Glover et al (2005), 454.
and support. “Faithful environmentalism”

The outcomes of the garden largely followed the findings in secular contexts: growing food, building community, and beautifying the neighborhood. I suggest that the particularity of church-sponsored gardens is indicated first by the provision of spiritual experiences. Specifically, connecting the practice and outcomes of gardening to a theological framework rooted in Scripture, tradition, and intentional community (as opposed to a vague and personal spirituality) further deepens the communal and environmental purposes of gardening for these church gardeners. Interestingly none of the gardens expressed a motivation of spiritual growth or communion with God, while churches reported such outcomes. While for theologians, this might indicate a disconnect between the theological literature on land and gardening and actual church gardeners; for environmental managers, the lack of explicit theological language may invite less confusing or threatening collaboration and conversation about gardening and community service.

The scope of these gardens is small in some ways, but their presence indicates larger movements. Churches reported the challenge of getting participation from church and community members to create a true “community” garden. These church gardens have continued relevance. According to the gardens, despite their challenges, community-building, as well as other objectives have been achieved at some level. Also, the depth and breadth of the reflections after gardens were established indicate that church gardens can gain a strong hold on Christian congregations and their clergy because of the profound relevance of the practice for their lives of this particular faith. If these continued motivations are articulated to church and community members, perhaps with more time the gardens will have more sustainable management. Also, as shown by the number of gardens that host numerous volunteer groups per year, these groups may be an important way to sustain church community gardens.

I suggest that with more information on church gardens, environmental and social justice groups will be able to foster relationships with church gardens. Future research could supplement this study by gaining the perspectives of neighbors and other gardeners, identifying the barriers to community participation, and more information about the environmental impact of church gardens. Environmental social justice advocates may see church gardens as important allies in addressing and integrating the issues of food deserts, urban blight, soil contamination, and destructive perspectives

79 McDuff (2010).
on the environment and in promoting community building, healthy eating, and environmental education. There is a continuing need for volunteer support, as well as expertise, funding, and supplies which secular groups may provide for church gardens. Expression of Christian faith in reflections on church gardens may also be a helpful way to open to secular groups a way of engaging Christianity.
V. Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank the five participating gardens in this study for answering my questions and making me a gardener. Thanks to my advisor, Dr. Norman Wirzba, for his inspiring thought on churches and gardens and to my technical advisor, Dr. Charlotte Clark, for training and support in NVivo and for enthusiastic support. Thanks also to Dr. Joel Herndon, head of the Duke Data and GIS Services, for his patience amid technical challenges and for his advocacy on my behalf. Finally, thanks to my husband for his tireless encouragement and good humor.

VI. Works Cited


Appendices

Appendix A. Sample recruitment email.

Dear [Leader]:

My name is Farley Lord Smith, and I am working to earn a Master's degree in environmental management at Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment and a Master's in theological studies at Duke Divinity School. I am conducting research on church community gardens to describe why churches found community gardens, how they connect to Christian theology, and what the practical needs of church gardens are.

I would love to include your church garden in my study. With your permission, I would participate with your community in gardening and other related activities. In addition, I would like to conduct interviews with you, the garden's other leaders, clergy, garden participants, other congregants, and neighbors. I would also distribute a survey at gardening events on the topics I listed above. Finally, I will ask you and gardeners for materials and documents relating to the garden to contribute to my research.

I will, of course, inform all participants of my presence and research objectives and will follow a detailed protocol to receive their consent before observing, interviewing, and photographing them.

I will be happy to discuss my research with you and answer any questions you have. You may contact me by phone at (404) 372-2035 or by email at farley.lord.smith@duke.edu. If you wish, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Charlotte Clark at (919) 684-3159 or charlotte.clark@duke.edu. The Duke University Human Subjects Committee has further information on the procedures of participatory research and can be reached at (919) 684-3030.
Appendix B. Interview guide.

Background on garden—founding story.

Why do you have/did you start a church garden? What were the motivations?

Theology—Are church gardens theologically meaningful? How? What specific doctrines or parts of scripture stand out to you? How does your church community garden promote the mission of the church?

Has the experience of the garden influenced, supported, or enhanced your theology and your understanding of what the church is about?

Environment—Has the experience of the community garden in a church context influenced your perception of the environment/Creation? Do you think others have been influenced by contact with the garden?

Do you use sustainable practices in the garden?

Has the experience of maintaining the garden motivated further sustainability measures in the congregation—among the gardens or among parishioners who might not garden—especially in an urban setting?

How do you think the garden contributes to environmental stewardship/creation care? How do you talk about that to the congregation or community members?

What qualities, values, and virtues do you think are instilled in community members by being involved with the garden? (Adults and children.) What can you learn from the garden about God, the environment, and humans’ role in the environment?

Integration—It seems that church community gardens integrate environmental and social justice ministries and therefore make a statement that these issues (and perhaps solutions) are indeed integrated. To what extent do you agree? Have you seen this integration in the garden? How does the church see the “balance” of environmental and social ministries provided by the garden? How is a garden uniquely suited to address these issues, and address them together?

Urban—Describe what role you think church gardens can play in an urban environment. Is the garden addressing urban-specific needs/issues? How has the garden been received by the community (church and neighbors)?

Practical—What are the challenges you face? What is needed for a church garden? What do you lack? What are the critiques of church community gardens? Ideas for community partnerships?