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## Gardens in Detroit?

The Capuchin Soup Kitchen Earthworks Program

“For the LORD, your God, is bringing you into a good country, a land with streams of water, with springs and fountains welling up in the hills and valleys, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, of olive trees and of honey, a land where you can eat bread without stint and where you will lack nothing...” Deut 8:7-9. Clearly, God intends goodness and health for humanity and the wide spectrum of creation of which it is a beautiful part. In 1997, Capuchin Rick Samyn, after overhearing a young person in the neighborhood speak about getting supper at a gas station, began to notice the disconnect between people and the sources where food originates. Rick, along with volunteers, began to clear trash and stones from donated plots of land near the soup kitchen in order to develop an urban farming project. To this day, the gardens and programs have continued to expand. 85% of the produce is used directly in the Capuchin Soup Kitchens. Furthermore, the dedicated staff and volunteers spend a large portion of time empowering young people in the neighborhood to develop their own community gardens. The wonderful programs are too numerous to mention here, so the latter part of this Vocation Update will include the *2008 Year in Review* that was written by the Earthworks staff. It is truly inspiring.



**Patrick Crouch, Program Manager, distributing seedlings from the greenhouse for community gardens.**

Lisa Richter, Outreach Coordinator, who has hosted Capuchin Candidates at Earthworks, graciously shared a bit of her own discernment journey. She highlights how work among our sisters and brothers in need as well as with the Earth opens us up to God’s call:

Having been raised in the suburbs in a middle class family, I never experienced a need for the basics of life. I did not know I had no ability to see myself in those that we served at the rotating church shelter events or the canned food drives. When I went into the cupboard for cans for the pantry drive, I always selected the items I would never eat, never imagining, never even considering that likely a young kid like me probably wouldn’t want canned beets either. As I grew older I began to question the world and found myself feeling sad and confused at times. I felt as if I had no right to suffer as I had so much (physically) surrounding me. Everything looked to be perfect, but I could not find peace in a setting where every lawn and every piece of hair was precisely in place, where depression was hidden behind well-painted lips. A part of me knew something was missing.

After many adventures in different parts of the country and world, I realized I didn’t know my own backyard. I chose to move to Detroit. The initial shock of so much urban decay was intense. Detroit, even if it wanted, could not hide its suffering, its burned out buildings, its overgrown lots, its prostitutes and drug abusers. To many, life in Detroit doesn’t seem worth living. My father won’t even come visit me here. My first months here were hard, adjusting to my new surroundings. I figured I’d leave after a few months but slowly a shift started happening. Slowly, I began to observe the daily changes in the blossoming tree out of my window, the generous, genuine smiles I received on my walk to work, the great strawberry patch that lie hidden in what appeared to be an overgrown ditch. I began to realize peace is accessible everywhere. I feel as though I have grown new eyes and a new heart. My heart has learned that suffering is everywhere and its okay. It cannot and should not be hidden. Detroit wears its suffering on its sleeve and hides its joys to many. Through meeting one kind, genuine, patient, honest person after another, through seeing irises bloom at an abandoned house, through the quiet time in meditation, my heart is open to the love that surrounds us and is us.

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# Earthworks Urban Farm Year In Review 2008

Greetings all. Here is your year end report for Earthworks Urban Farm, provided for your amazement and amusement. So let's get into it; we start with the numbers and then get into the more wordy stuff.

Totals for this year in terms of produce equaled over 6,000 pounds of produce. Those numbers are down, and will continue to drop in coming years as we reduce our use of hybrid seed varieties. While we view nothing wrong with the use of hybrid seeds, using open pollinated varieties allows us the opportunities to save and breed our own seeds as well teach others seed saving methods.

The apiary produced over 900 pounds of honey, a reduction in overall yield, but not bad at all considering that we lost almost half our hives last year. Instead of increasing our overall number of hives, we decided to focus our attention on the overall health of those that remain. Call it a rebuilding year if you like. Additional products made from our hives included our ever popular hand balm, with over 2000 tins made. With berries from our gardens, we managed to make over 1000 jars of jam in such delectable flavors as gooseberry, elderberry, currant, gooseberry honey, grape, and black raspberry.

With our partners at Michigan State University, The Greening of Detroit, and The Detroit Agriculture Network we continued to develop the Garden Resource Program Collaborative. Through GRPC, we distributed over 100,000 transplants, 12,000 packets of seeds, and over 100 pounds of seed garlic to community, family, and school gardens in Detroit, Highland Park, and Hamtramck. Classes were taught on a variety of topics including canning, seed starting, basic gardening, seed saving, and many more. The Sweet on Detroit program (a collaborative partnership with the aforementioned partners) was able to teach 30 new beekeepers, as well as develop advanced apiary skills.

We increased the involvement of our soup kitchen community in a multitude of ways. Our spring and fall blessings of the garden gave a nice opportunity for reflection and fellowship, as well as opening and closings to the gardening year. Our neighborhood open house in early summer gave us a chance to show everyone what we are up to and how they can be involved; we even managed to convince a bunch of folks to get into beekeeping suits, and help us out in the hives. The bulk of our vegetables and herbs went into the soup kitchen, providing healthy food for



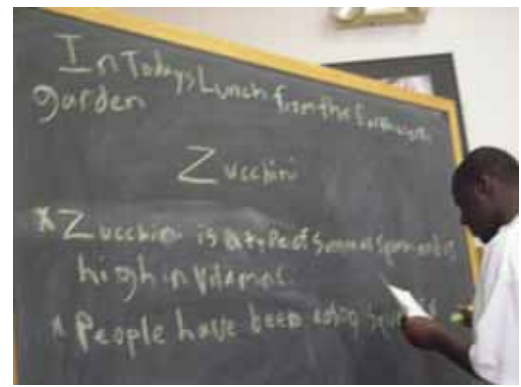
# Earthworks Urban Farm Year In Review 2008

our friends. We used a blackboard in the kitchen to let folks know what produce they were eating and why it was good for them. Soup kitchen guests interested in gardening were able to grow whatever they desired in garden plots we made available. With them, we spent many great mornings sharing the joy of growing one's own food.

With the majority of our food now supplying the soup kitchen, less of our food goes to some of the markets we have been active in over the past few years, especially the markets that serve Women, Infant and Child (WIC) participants. Anticipating this, we helped to contract other farmers to provide produce at these markets and arranged for chefs to conduct cooking demonstrations and taste tests to make these events great successes. We hope to be able to continue to facilitate more and more connections between farmers and Detroit markets.

We began a monthly series of community food justice meetings. We ate food together, shared ideas, watched movies, performed plays, shared our talents and had fun. Soup Kitchen community members also formed a group called F.O.O.D. – Fields Of Our Dreams – which meets weekly to discuss policy decisions being made that affect them, as well as ways in which they could work to develop more food secure communities and how we could assist them. This year we also hosted two large local foods dinners to celebrate the benefits of eating locally and building community, both catered by the Soup Kitchen's own Chef Alison Costello. 75 people attended the Earth Day Dinner and over 150 people came to the Harvest Dinner.

We hosted university students: first Maggie from the Michigan State University Student Organic Farms Organic Certificate program for 9 wonderful weeks, giving her the opportunity to hone her farming skills before striking out on her own. We also were a site for Wayne State University students in Dr. Kami Pothukuchi's Food and Cities class. They worked on a project on how to develop projects like ours at other locations, especially faith based organizations. Then in late spring, University of Michigan students seriously kept us on our toes (literally barefooted squishing in mud) for a 3 week outdoor cob (straw, sand and clay) building project. It was a lot of work and a lot of fun. The perennial beds they planted look great and got lots of compliments all summer and fall. The cob benches still need a finish coat, but are finally dry and staying that way under the timber frame structure. The roof of the timber frame structure



# Earthworks Urban Farm Year In Review 2008

needs some dirt and clover seed thrown on it, but otherwise it's great. Next year we'll plant all around the benches and they will blend in with the rest of the garden.

We kept up on our composting, continuing to collect kitchen scraps from our Soup Kitchen, Gleaners Food Bank and a local bakery and expanding to collect from our other soup kitchen location. We refined our composting methods to be better neighbors by keeping that lovely farm smell to a minimum, as well as make less work for ourselves. It made for a shortage of compost in the short term, but we think we stand to benefit in the long term.

Youth programming continues to grow with a core group of teens enrolled in Youth Farm Stand, and more on the way. Both Youth Farm Stand and Growing Healthy Kids meet most every week from February through November as well as a week long summer camp. The kids were also treated to a local foods dinner and tour at Wayne State University, hosted by SEED Wayne and Dr. Pothuckuchi in a partnership that grew even stronger this year. We have been working steadily on printing Growing Healthy Kids lesson plans to share with other local community groups interested in starting their own kids gardening program. Youth Farm Stand participated in 7 farmers' markets over the summer, from such diverse locations as the Solanus Center to Eastern Market, and had a lot of fun in the process. In addition, we partnered with The Greening of Detroit to support 5 other youth farm stand programs in Youth Growing Detroit, a collaborative to help youth growers in the city. Youth Grow Detroit hosted 2 conferences to bring all the kids together as well as give them a chance to develop new skills.

As always, we are grateful to all the wonderful folks who volunteered their time with us, some coming by weekly to look after the garden, others dropping in as they could. Without the spirit and generosity of these many hands, Earthworks would not be what it is today.

Looking to the future for Earthworks, we have a lot in store for 2009. In addition to continuing our existing programming, we plan to install another greenhouse this summer for year round production, add additional community garden plots if there is demand, work with the Youth Farm Stand teens to develop their own garden site, and continue to increase access to fresh food in our neighborhood. And of course to have fun. Lots of it.

Visit [www.CapuchinFranciscans.org](http://www.CapuchinFranciscans.org) to learn more about how to become a Capuchin

Visit [www.cskdetroit.org](http://www.cskdetroit.org) to learn more about EarthWorks

