

Reap what you sow: Our Lady of the Fields plants garden, feeds homeless



John Hoppa, Susan Burns and Troy Miller are some of the Our Lady of the Fields, Millersville, parishioners who helped launch the straw bale garden, which yields fresh vegetables for the people in need the parish serves on Friday nights in Baltimore. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

By Elizabeth Lowe

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MILLERSVILLE - Down the hill from Our Lady of the Fields' sanctuary in Millersville, and adjacent to sprawling pastoral fields, is the parish's new straw bale garden.

The garden boasts fruits and vegetables, including beans, cucumbers, eggplant, radishes, squash and tomatoes.

Our Lady of the Fields parishioner Susan Burns came up with the idea for the garden earlier this year as she prepared to facilitate Care for Creation, the Franciscan Action Network's adult formation program that challenges participants to lessen their carbon footprint.

John Hoppa, another Our Lady of the Fields parishioner, suggested the straw bale garden, a type of container gardening using a straw bale.

"It (the garden) not only provides vegetables, it's a learning experience for people," he said.

The 73-year-old was among the Our Lady of the Fields parishioners who donated and planted flowers, plants and seeds June 14 and harvested three cucumbers three weeks later. Another four were picked July 11.

The cucumbers, pulled pork and casseroles were served that night at St. Vincent de Paul in Baltimore, where Our Lady of the Fields' Friday Night Homeless Ministry feeds 100 to 300 every week.

See a video of this ministry.

"That's what the importance of it is - it's coming together, caring for the least of his (Jesus') brothers," said Burns, 67, a Secular Franciscan. "It just brings joy to my

heart.”



John Hoppa, a parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville, proposed a straw bale garden for a parish outreach program. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

Hoppa and his wife, Joan, have been a part of the Friday Night ministry since 2007. On Friday afternoons they help heat casseroles at the Millersville parish, then deliver the food and serve it at St. Vincent de Paul.

“It (the garden) enhances meals when there are fresh vegetables available,” John Hoppa said. “The results provide food for the homeless.”

Troy Miller, an Our Lady of the Fields’ parishioner, donated the 36 straw bales.

“It’s a great way to bring the church together and provide for the hungry,” said Miller, 53.

Casserole makers are needed for the Friday ministry to the homeless. Call 410-923-0344 to volunteer. To share recipes that use beans, squash, eggplant, carrots and onions, email seburns318@comcast.net.

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