

Project Report for Shared Harvest Cooperative Community Garden at Mount Olive

Upon receiving a box of just-picked Shared Harvest Garden vegetables from our pastor, a child in a waiting car exclaimed, "Squash!" to which the mother, a pantry neighbor who had come for food responded, "My children love vegetables," and she began to cry. Another woman who received vegetables enthusiastically bit into a just-picked cucumber, held it up and proclaimed, "This cucumber is blessed by God!" This is two of many stories about pantry neighbors who came to our Loaves and Fishes Pantry expecting canned goods, packaged goods and frozen food, and received fresh vegetables from our garden.

We started a vegetable garden with two raised beds in 2021. Building upon lessons learned, we decided to expand our garden in 2022 to provide fresh vegetables to those neighbors who come to our weekly pantry. One of our goals was to bring members of the community together to grow their own food and food for the pantry. We enthusiastically planned to meet with the twenty pantry neighbors who expressed interest working in the garden. No one showed up. Undeterred we moved forward.

A member of our pickleball ministry volunteered to rebuild our two 6-foot by 8-foot raised garden beds to a more manageable size of 2-foot by 8-foot. With funds from our Hardy Plant Society Grant and donations, we purchased materials and supplies for the rebuilding and for two additional 2-foot by 8-foot raised garden beds. A team member purchased an 8-foot by 2-foot 32-inch-high tall steel bed so that our seniors could garden without straining their backs and another team member donated two 2-foot by 4-foot steel beds that we placed on cinder blocks.

A raised bed was built with left-over wood for a family from India to grow produce native to India such as karela and a yellow musk melon.

Funds from The Hardy Plant Society Grant enabled us to grow and distribute over 130 pounds of vegetables to our pantry neighbors, to purchase garden tools (shovels, shears, gloves, trowels, rakes, cultivators, etc.) and supplies (soil, seeds, seedlings, etc.). We grew kale, collards, chard, cucumbers, spinach, green peppers, pole beans, bush beans, zucchini, yellow squash, yellow crookneck squash, potatoes, basil, rosemary, parsley, and tomatoes. Marigolds were planted to deter pest. The grant funds also helped us to become the first garden for which funds were included from a Maryland Food Bank Capacity Building Grant awarded to our Loaves and Fishes Pantry to purchase a garden shed and supplies to continue our expansion. We completed planting the Fall 2022 garden by the end of September.

Our next phase will focus on engaging the community, especially those who received fresh vegetables, to volunteer and give input to the Spring 2023 garden that we have begun planning. This phase is part of a community organizing project for the garden coordinator's EarthKeeper training project that includes learning to compost. During this

August training, the garden was renamed “Shared Harvest Cooperative Community Garden at Mount Olive” because everyone works on the entire garden and the produce goes to pantry neighbors whether they volunteer one hour or twenty hours or zero hours. Unlike 2021, we became familiar with numerous garden pests that we are planning to better manage in 2023. We look forward to continuing to expand the garden and volunteers and increasing our gardening knowledge and our harvest.

We acknowledged the Hardy Plant Society Grant support on our social media: Mount Olive Facebook Page ([Mount Olive United Methodist Church - Randallstown, MD | Facebook](#)) and Mount Olive Website Homepage ([Mount Olive UMC | Randallstown, MD \(mountoliveumcmd.org\)](#)). Additionally, the grant is acknowledged on the General Board of Global Ministries EarthKeepers “Projects” Website ([Projects | Global Ministries \(umcmision.org\)](#)). This is a global organization. Information about the grant was shared with [NeighborSpace of Baltimore County – Protecting Land to Improve Communities \(neighborspacebaltimorecounty.org\)](#). Lastly, Maryland Foodbank and a coalition of pantry group leaders were also told about and encouraged to apply for the grant.

