



Healthy Living

Sustainable gardening for St. John School and Parish

BY STEPHANIE GENCO
 Teacher/Garden Coordinator

The excitement is blooming at St. John the Baptist in Alden as they prepare for their new community garden. Working with a grant from the Whole Kids Foundation, as well as generous parishioners and local businesses, they have begun a school-wide garden initiative as a way to teach principles of healthy living and sustainability through authentic educational experiences.

“(Sustainability) has immediate as well as long-term rewards. Generally, sustainability is forward-thinking, looking ahead to secure a future for you and yours, getting things to last, making things better than you’ve

found them. When one chooses to preserve and protect resources, to make as little negative impact on the earth as possible, to nurture the planet as well as those around us, one has chosen the path of sustainability” (from the Planet Natural Research Center).

This aligns with the ideology set forth by the STREAM Education Initiative of Western New York Catholic Schools, which seeks to integrate curricular areas and give them practical, real-world applications.

The goals of the project are many: Teach and implement sustainability practices with students, including composting, organic

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COURTESY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

In the afterschool Garden Club, third- and fourth-grade students start planting seeds that will grow in the community garden at St. John the Baptist, Alden.

Garden Club teaches school about value of composting

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 maintenance, resource management and conservation, and physical nourishment; develop a schoolwide STREAM project with student-driven research, design, planting, care and harvesting; build awareness about where food comes from and encourage nutritious food choices, including in their own cafeteria; and create a stronger sense of community and partnership between the school, parish and wider community, bettering Alden in a beautiful and practical way.

In addition to STREAM, St. John's students have the opportunity to attend Garden Club weekly after school. This club has already set up school composting by designating additional garbage cans in the cafeteria for compostable materials, making small green buckets available for classrooms and offices, and assembling a large outdoor composter. They then made posters for the school with guidelines for



COURTESY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Fifth-grade students set up the new composter for the community garden at St. John the Baptist, Alden.

what materials can be composted and what should go in the garbage or recycling.

Garden Club also worked with teachers and parent experts to determine what produce to plant, learning about companion planting to support growth. The new garden features a cross design of four raised beds, with additional beds and pots on the sides. It has fondly been named, "The Rock Garden," as it sits on the grounds of the former house known as "The Rock," which served as a convent for the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Garden Committee hopes that in addition to the previously mentioned goals, this area may serve as a place of reflection and prayer in nature.

To kick off their new endeavor in healthy living and sustainable practices, students, families and parishioners joined together for an Earth Day groundbreaking event on Sunday, April 22. Looking ahead, they hope to host a back-to-school, farm-to-table event in August.



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