



The P.O.P.'s Garden Project is a mission that was started last summer at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Johnsonville, PA. All of the produce grown in the 20'x50' garden on the church's property has been earmarked for donation to local food pantries. Church member Laraine Brands put her idea into action last spring when she began working on bringing the garden to life. When asked what inspired her idea, she replied, "Every time I'd drive past St. Peter Lutheran Church, Plainfield Township, and see their garden, I'd think, "Why can't our church do something like that? Then I heard the congregation's pastor speak on church gardens and it really expanded my ideas." When asked how prayer influenced her decision to start the garden ministry, Laraine replied that she continually asks and thanks God for giving her the strength, energy and health to do everything needed to take on a project of this size.

God answered Laraine's prayers as she began to organize and gather information. She managed to find a mentor with many years of gardening experience. Jim Sand, who runs the St. Peters church garden, inspired Laraine and gave her a crash course on how to start up and maintain a church garden.



After weeks of organization and a handful of volunteers, the actual work on the first garden began in late spring of 2013. After securing permission from the church, members of the garden committee began to dig up and till the plot, pick rocks, take soil samples, fertilize, mulch and put up fencing. Seeds and seedlings were planted and watering problems were solved by implementing rain barrels with downspout converters. After the work was done, everyone put their faith in God's handiwork and the garden took off, growing with only a few minor pest problems.

During this time the garden committee continued to meet every week to water and weed. An application for a grant was sent in and the group began to plan for raising funds with a t-shirt sale. To everyone's delight, generous donations were already coming in from the congregation. The garden was already making an impact before it even began to produce.

In the following weeks, the garden produced beyond anyone's expectations despite its late start in the season. The group began to make its first deliveries (squash, zucchini, green beans, beats, cabbage and broccoli) to the P.U.M.P. food pantry in Portland. The response from the food pantry was encouraging. The families they served loved the fresh vegetables now made available to them each week. The little garden was a success! In a just a few short weeks the garden had produced 243 pounds of produce!



The committee is busy planning the next garden with the prayer that God will continue to bless their ministry. Laraine told us that their plan for next year is to enlarge the garden to be able to grow a wider variety and greater quantity of vegetables. Their goal is to be able to provide fresh produce for more programs that feed the hungry in our community. When asked about her vision for the garden in the years to come, Laraine said that she would like to see churches come together in a sort of “cross pollination” to help each other start up and manage their gardens so we can all work together to provide food pantries with even more fresh produce for hungry families.