



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

OCTOBER 2011

**KNOWING
CHRIST'S LOVE
- ANSWERING
GOD'S CALL**

Eighth Street Mennonite Church food garden located near the church building shown in the background. Pickers pictured are (standing) Delores Bartel, Ben Wiebe, Kristin Saner; and (kneeling in front) Leonard Wiebe, Rachel Eisenhour and Joan Wiebe. Photos by bartelart.com



Eighth Street church project “Empty lot” produces 600+ pounds of vegetables for Goshen food pantry

By Rachel M. Giovarelli

CDC congregation Eighth Street, Goshen, turned an empty lot into a garden that had produced over 600 pounds of vegetables by the end of September. After the demolition of rental houses on the lot a few years ago, the church considered the idea of a garden that would benefit the community. Ben Wiebe, a junior at Goshen High School, brought this idea back into conversation last fall to benefit the Harvest of Hope Food Pantry.

Ben discussed the possibility with Pastor Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau and she put him in contact with others who shared interest in a church garden. The church approved the endeavor and set up a committee to oversee the project.

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“Empty lot” produces vegetables

Ben and his grandfather, Leonard Wiebe, serve as chairs of the committee. Other members include Delores Bartel and Rachel Eisenhour who both assist in planting, harvesting and delivering the crops to the food pantry. Delores also provided the plants for the garden.

Due to the economic recession and the closure of several RV plants in the Goshen and Elkhart areas, the need for dietary assistance has drastically increased in Goshen. The Harvest of Hope Food Pantry is open every Monday from 5:30 to 7 p.m. and provides food items such as flour, sugar and canned goods for families in need. On average, 50 families a week visit the food pantry, according to Leonard. Eighth Street is helping fill the community need by providing fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers that are less commonly donated.

The garden is a 20-by-30 foot plot on the south side of the church property. The committee dug up the lot last fall and planted the crops this spring. The result was:

- 50 tomato plants, 27 pepper plants, and cucumber plants, and
- over 600 pounds of vegetables by the end of September.

All the crops produced “amazingly well” in spite of the ground quality. Leonard said the first donation of vegetables was July 25 and since then the church has delivered four to five boxes every Monday.

The Eighth Street congregation has shown much interest in the project and is “very supportive,” according to Leonard. Joan Wiebe, Ben’s grandmother, said the congregation was “happy to see a young person taking initiative.”

The trustees set up easy water access and a Sunday school class provided a water barrel to help out. In addition, several members assisted by delivering vegetables and many others came to look at the garden. Pastor Sawatzky Paetkau said that the project is “intergenerational” and that the interest of individuals over several years “made the garden happen.”



More Eighth Street church produce

According to Leonard, the committee is considering continuing the garden project next year as part of a three-year experiment.

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