



Meet the QP Faces Behind the Emmett Schulte Food Pantry Garden

The Emmett Schulte Garden, a member of Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens, grows 8,000+ pounds of fresh produce per year for the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC) food pantry and meal program. Behind the scenes leading this valiant effort are three garden leaders, all of whom are members of Our Lady Queen of Peace.

“‘Feed the Hungry’ is the first of the corporal works of mercy, and is always a good way to put into practice the two great commandments Jesus gave us: Love of God and love of neighbor,” said Msgr. Jim Uppena, whom many parishioners know from his days serving as a Priest in Residence at Queen of Peace. Since retiring in 2014, Msgr. Jim has been actively involved in all aspects of managing and operating the garden. Considering he was raised on a dairy farm in a family that grew much of the food they ate, Msgr. Jim said that volunteering at the garden helps him connect with his roots. He is the only volunteer to come to the job already knowing how to drive a tractor ... one of many reasons that has made him an MVP (Most Valuable Priest!) at the garden!

When CMC took on stewardship of a food pantry garden for the first time in 2011, it needed to find a volunteer leader. CMC turned to longtime volunteer Dick Reynolds for help. When this opportunity arose to become a bigger part of CMC’s mission, he said “yes” and hasn’t stopped since. “Growing up with 17 years of Catholic education has driven home the point that the world is a big place and we all have some opportunity and responsibility to give back,” explained Dick. Dick enjoys the camaraderie with the other garden volunteers, a fair number of whom are also Queen of Peace parishioners, and he appreciates seeing how each year the garden improves a little more. As part of the larger group effort, he has single handedly delivered thousands of pounds of produce directly to CMC himself over the years.

Tim Kreeger is the garden leader most likely to be tinkering and coming up with new improvements. After joining the team in 2017, within a couple of years Tim found himself joining the leadership team. “It just kind of happened!” he said, adding, “I just like to play, when it comes to different gardening techniques.” Several years

ago, Tim led Schulte Garden in implementing an extensive no-till bed system in a portion of the garden to improve soil health, increase production and make the plants easier for volunteers to access.

This year, he rigged up a gas-powered pump on a trailer to speed up watering the garden. There is no groundwater source at the garden, so everything is watered with rainwater collected in several 250 gallon tanks connected to the large garden shed and then transported to the plants by an eclectic array of hoses, pumps, tractors, barrels, watering cans and volunteers.



Each of these leaders volunteers their time to manage what amounts to a small farm. Over the course of one year, they easily contribute 100+ hours. The job does not stop when the snow flies, either. The off-season is spent planning and obtaining supplies for the coming growing season. A part of these three volunteers’ motivation for putting so much effort into the garden is their desire to honor the legacies of Emmett Schulte and Msgr. Ken Fiedler. Emmett Schulte founded the Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens along with Ken Witte over 20 years ago. This duo had noticed that food pantries did not have much, if any, fresh produce, and collecting leftovers from farmers’ markets was not nearly enough to meet demand. The next year, they had 3 acres in cultivation on different parcels of donated land, producing 60,000 pounds of produce. They saw brothers and sisters in need of help, and humbly and efficiently took action to meet that need themselves. They prayed with their feet and their hands, in addition to their words



and their hearts. Emmett's wife Mary Ann often joined him in the garden until he passed away in 2020. She was regularly seen volunteering at the garden this past summer, even on some of the hottest, driest days.

Msgr. Ken was at the helm of the CMC in 2011 when he helped forge the partnership that gave CMC access to and stewardship over one of the food pantry gardens. The three garden leaders carry out his wishes to make the CMC "a beacon of hope" for all in need by providing ample, healthy food for its programs.

As St. Thomas Aquinas and Queen of Peace continue their journey together as pastorate 21, Dick, Msgr. Jim, and Tim look forward to seeing how the food pantry garden mission can further expand and unfold. "I want people to feel that [the CMC and the Emmett Schulte Garden] isn't just QP church's mission, but the mission of the whole pastorate," Dick reflected. "It is a great opportunity to help bring each church together." St. Thomas Aquinas has a long history of supporting the CMC and gardening efforts as well, including with the charitable garden in its own backyard.

CMC staff would like to offer its deepest and sincere thanks to each of these garden leaders who have done so much in the name of caring for our brothers and sisters in need and being good stewards of God's creation. The garden is the only program of this size at CMC which is primarily coordinated and managed by volunteers. As of mid-October, 6,000 pounds were grown, harvested and delivered to the CMC this year under the care of Dick, Msgr. Jim and Tim. Next time you see them around, please tell them "thank you!" for their meaningful work!

To learn more about the Emmett Schulte Garden or to get involved, please contact Laura Green at the CMC: Laura@cmcmadison.org or 608-441-1180.

*Submitted by Laura Green,
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Few professions probably take more faith than farming and gardening.

It takes faith in the quality of the soil – that seeds and plants will actually thrive and grow.

It takes faith that the seeds will actually germinate.

It takes faith that the rains will come, keep the plants alive and nourished throughout the whole growing season.

It takes faith that the plants will produce an abundant harvest to feed the hungry.

- MSGR. JIM UPPENA

