

## Caring for Creation – Environmental Ministry

Like so many of our Ministries this one began with a tap on the shoulder from Father Andy. “There is a class you should take at the Watershed Stewards Academy, it will only take a year to complete and there is so much you could bring to our parish.”

“Of course Fr Andy” was the only answer. As part of that class Holy Family received grant funding from the Alliance for the Chesapeake, for the design, permitting, installation, as well as all the plants in the two new Rain Gardens at the front of the church at no cost. The two Oak Rain Barrels at the rear of the Chapel were also included in this grant as well. Now all the water from the Chapel roof and surrounding parking lot and the horseshoe entrance is now captured and treated by the Native Plants before being release downstream into the Upper Patuxent watershed.

Since then we have begun reforesting an area at the rear of the church property that we were paying to be mowed on a regular basis. A call out to our parishioners was placed and 60 trees were planted on a cold fall Saturday in the fall of 2015. Since then, 31 families have joined our “Adopt a Tree” program and have committed to water their trees when we have not received enough rain while the trees establish themselves for the first few years. We are truly blessed to have these families make a personal difference in the Our Lords, Caring for Creation.

We have since received a couple of new \$1000.00 grants from Unity Gardens for native trees shrubs that were planted in a new garden by the front of the Chapel and the rear of the Post Office. Close to 1,000 volunteer hours in the last year or so have be exercised in the removal of invasive plants and vines and planting of new native plants, specifically supporting our local wildlife.

Every time there has been a need for volunteers our parishioners have responded. Be it the Liturgy men feeding a wood chipper, or the Youth Group pulling weeds and vines. Parishioners have built Blue Bird Houses which are stationed throughout the property. Students with a need for service hours have power washed, picked up trash and of course pulled so many invasives out of the property.

The most recent time the Holy Spirit touched us was in early August. Had been out of town for a month or so and came back to find the Chapel and the Forest Edger Restoration site behind the Post Office completely overgrown with invasives again. Some of it was four feet tall! Could have just cried, thinking how will this work ever get done? A half hour later the phone rings and Mike from the Youth Ministry calls and says, “Hey, I have all these kids available next week and was wondering if there was anything they could do?” The next week over four days, groups of six youth volunteers and their leaders cleaned up both the sites and they look absolutely wonderful to this day.

