



### **Midterm Local Case Study Report – Prince of Peace Lutheran Church**

The organization I chose is not a formal organization but a collection of partnerships centered around Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Portage, MI. Located in a mid-sized city on a busy main road, Prince of Peace has a unique property that includes a “backyard” of twelve acres. Most of the land remains undeveloped save for the walking trails one of the neighbors mows through the tall grasses. There are a few groves of mature trees, and a couple of years ago, Prince of Peace, under the direction of a member of the Kalamazoo Conservation District, planted about fifty saplings throughout the field. These trees included White Pines, Sugar Maples, and Red Maples, which are currently suited for the weather zone immediately south of Michigan. However, the Kalamazoo Conservation representative felt that as our planet continues to warm, the location will be perfect in twenty years when the trees mature.



In addition to the new trees, they have bee hives and a solar-powered water fountain filled with sphagnum moss for the bees to have safe, easy access to water. Surrounding the hives are native plants managed by a member from Native Connections. Native Connections is a native seed farm that creates native seed mixes for different habitats. Finally, they have a large Jubilee Garden managed by one of the church members, who is a master gardener. He oversees the Jubilee Garden with a crew of volunteers from the congregation and other master gardeners who volunteer at area community gardens. This incredible garden produces an average of one thousand pounds of vegetables annually.



The food they harvest from the garden goes to another local organization called Mothers of Hope in Kalamazoo, a larger neighboring city immediately north of Portage. Mothers of Hope help mothers reintegrate into the community after incarceration or who are in recovery from substance abuse. Their multi-faceted approach includes working with the master gardeners to teach the women how to grow food in the area community gardens or their backyards and supplying them with the crops from Prince of Peace's Jubilee Garden.

Fresh, nutritious food can be challenging for these women to obtain, so the vegetables from Prince of Peace stay local and go to people in need. Not only are the Mothers of Hope clients immediately fed, but they are learning how to grow, cultivate and prepare nutritious food for the future. Keeping crops local reduces pollution caused during transportation, and transforming individual yards from grass to crops reduces runoff because most garden crops have deeper roots than typical turf grass. Additionally, biodiversity throughout the neighborhoods creates a habitat that is friendlier to pollinators and serves the area's environmental health better than a monoculture of grass.

Prince of Peace practices ecological stewardship, or Earthkeeping, first by allowing the majority of their acreage to be open and natural, or as Richard Bauckham wrote, "give space again for other creatures to be themselves." (Bauckham, p. 107) It is an island of open land for plants and animals in the middle of a city. There is no road frontage, so it is somewhat protected from cars and people. The neighbors living along the perimeter also appreciate the space, with the only trade-off being that any of their hostas or gardens are fair game for the deer. (A very tall fence protects the Jubilee Garden.) The trees the Prince of Peace members planted represent their plans to maintain the natural space for the future and their plans to continue taking measures to help reduce their carbon footprint.

The bees are new to Prince of Peace this summer. A member skilled in beekeeping installed the hives and the fountain with sphagnum moss. Prince of Peace's backyard protects the bees from city life, allowing them to freely enjoy and pollinate the local native plants and garden vegetable flowers in their immediate vicinity and the surrounding neighborhoods. The beekeeping member is also teaching others how to tend the hive and furthers the education by actively posting about the bees on Prince of Peace's Facebook page. Through direct teaching and social media, many followers are learning more about the importance of bees to our food web and how to care for and respect them properly.



The land ethic of the Hebrew Bible tells us that all things belong to God, and God calls us to care for that land and all living things. “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1, NRSV). God calls us to love each other, care for each other, and seek justice for the oppressed. God also calls us to tend the land and animals, caring for them with kindness and utilizing practices that lead to environmental flourishing. Within this command, God also gave us limits for how we are to behave. Humanity is at its best when we work within the parameters God set for us within this incredible creation, exercising self-control and seeking the best for all systems. Dr. Padgett lectured that God did not give us power *over* the world but rather gave us power *for* the world. We must recognize our place and dependency in the interconnected web of natural relationships.

The network, or relational web, that Prince of Peace facilitates with their gifts of property and human resources takes these Divine commands seriously. The church members actively participate with other community groups who work for the betterment of the environment and the success of their neighbors. They steward their land with natural landscaping and native plants, planting trees for the future, growing crops to supply local communities, and raising bees for honey and pollination opportunities. They also welcomed the bees because their backyard is a lovely place for city bees to thrive. They have built relationships between local organizations, creating connections between people and groups with unique skills and passions and providing avenues for them to share and offer support mutually. Working together, all these groups embody love for the land and their neighbors in the most inclusive sense.

Bauckham, Richard. “Responses. From Richard Bauckham” Essay. In *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation*, edited by Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, 106-109. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020.

Images:

Page 1, top: Prince of Peace’s backyard.

Page 1, mid-left: Planting trees in circular groves, May 2020.

Page 1, mid-center: Saplings were caged and covered with leaf mulch.

Page 1, mid-right: Volunteers watered the trees twice a week throughout the first summer, using a large water tank.

Page 2: Volunteers harvest the Jubilee Garden.

Page 3, left: The hives at Prince of Peace began with three boxes, and now have a stack of five.

Page 3, center: The solar-powered sphagnum moss fountain, providing easy, safe, flavored water for the bees.

Page 3, right: The resident beekeeper teaching children about the bees.