

# Plano church gardeners plant seeds in hearts

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PLANO—Every week, [First Baptist Church](#) sows and harvests compassion through its community garden.

Ian, age 4, and his mother dig onions in the community garden at First Baptist Church in Plano. (PHOTOS/Grace Gaddy)

Saturdays at 9 a.m., volunteers gather on a half-acre lot across from the downtown Plano church. They weave through rows of ripening crops with contagious energy—watering, digging, planting, picking.

Their efforts exhibit the church's mission to reach out and serve the surrounding community. Gardeners donate half of the produce—and often more—to local food pantries.

Ben Haning, who oversees and coordinates the garden ministry, recalled how the idea took root.

“Pastor Jerry challenged the deacon body to reach out to the neighborhood immediately around the church,” he said. “I was driving around the neighborhood and thought that since we had this acre lot across the street from the church, a community garden might serve the needs of the community right there.”



Volunteers find vegetables ready for picking.

Through involvement in the [Texas Offering for World Hunger](#), the church became aware of the growing problem of hunger in many Texas families. Haning saw the garden as a natural way to provide for that need, and the church agreed to help facilitate his vision.

“The community garden was a project that God planted in seed,” Pastor Jerry Carlisle said. “As (Haning) began to design it and implement it, a lot of us said, ‘O, we’d love to see this.’ Our missions committee provided some initial funding, and the church approved ministry teams specifically for the garden.”

After a successful crop in 2010, participants set specific goals for 2011.

“We hope to give away 1,000 pounds of produce this year,” Carlisle explained. “We also hope to build relationships with people in the community and affect their quality of life in a positive way by helping them to learn how to grow food for themselves.”



Members of First Baptist Church in Plamo work on a Saturday afternoon in the community garden.

Since apartment dwellers lack gardening space and it is scarce for other local families, the garden provides a place to grow, he said. Thirty-six plots—4 feet x 20 feet—comprise the garden, open to anyone wanting to grow fresh produce and give some back to the community. Gardeners are responsible to cultivate their own plots, and they find their weekly duties posted in a bulletin inside the garden.

“I think it’s a wonderful project, a great way to engage our community and build relationships,” Carlisle said. “I also like getting dirt under my fingernails. It’s therapeutic.”

Carlisle called the garden a “wonderful conversation starter,” a point Haning also underscored.

“It’s been fun getting to know folks in the neighborhood,”



Mary Spencer works in the community garden of First Baptist Church in Plano. (PHOTOS/Grace Gaddy)

Haning said. “People will stop and talk to you when you’re out there working on church grounds. There’s a fair amount of pedestrian traffic through that neighborhood because of the people that ride the DART train down into Dallas. Some of those people walk in that area, so people will stop and talk to you and ask what you’re doing.”

Haning described what he hopes will come out of it all.

“Short term, I want to grow vegetables to give to people that may be in a bind as far as their ability to provide for their families,” he said. “And long term, I want the opportunity to make friends with the people that work in the garden and be able to witness to them somewhere down the line.”

Ultimately, the mission is to please and glorify God through the garden’s outreach, Haning said. They seek to plant seeds in the heart, as well as the soil.