

Together in Christ

A letter from Bishop Devadhar

July 1, 2022

Beloved in Christ:

Greetings in the precious and matchless name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the month of July we celebrate the arrival of new clergy/families in our communities, the continuation of the ministries clergy who have been reappointed to our churches or who have been appointed to extension ministries and other ministry settings, and the clergy who have retired after years of faithful ministry.

No matter where or at what point someone is in ministry, every clergy-person touches the lives of others. Many a time, a seed sown by a clergy will yield fruit even decades after they've served in that local church or ministry setting.


Last Sunday, I preached at Calvary United Methodist Church in Middletown, RI, a church where vibrant ministries are taking place.

One of them is "God's Community Garden." The church leader who gave us a tour of the garden shared with me that this ministry has given 61,562 pounds (30 tons) of produce to food pantries, soup kitchens and Islanders in need over the last 15 years! Wow! What a great ministry!

This ministry, which is a joint ministry of Calvary, Portsmouth, and St. Paul's UMCs reminds me of a passage of scripture from the Book of Leviticus (26:4-5, NIV): "I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land."

"God's Community Garden" in Middletown is providing the food people want and need and is blessing its community. It was inspired by the late Bishop Dale White. From the [garden's online history written during the 2016-17 season](#):



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Our purpose is to ... Change the Island's visual environment and community character instigated by Bishop Dale White's vision to serve the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters by transforming Calvary UMC's lawn into a prophetic sign-act supported by the Island's three United Methodist churches.

Sign-acts are nonverbal forms of communication whose purpose is to have a persuasive impact upon our neighbors. Bishop White's sign-act reveals to Island neighbors just how they too can create Livable Landscape by transforming unproductive yards into active gardens and improve Social Well-being through neighbors helping neighbors to build self-supporting communities on our Island.

Bishop White, a visionary who was deeply committed to the defense of God's creation in every shape and form, started sowing seeds of transformation not only here, but also for the transformation of youth and young adults as well as many others through his prophetic voice and pastoral heart.

Again, his vision is not only helping those in need, but also allowing the communities to do an ecumenical ministry and allowing the laity to develop their passion for justice and peace ministries. Laity who are inspired by the vision of Bishop White continue this legacy to extend the work of the Kingdom of God.

Friends, we know it! Church is not a building, but the people of God! When people of God, clergy and laity alike, are open to the Spirit of God and work together, we can make a difference in the world! When we gather as a community of faith despite our theological platforms, when we are open to hear what the Spirit is telling us through a preacher or others, we will make a difference in the world.

Think about it ... in our Conference area, many churches may have space to give birth to a community garden! Are we open to the possibilities of doing something new? Some of our churches may not have space for the garden but may think of other ways to support a nearby garden ministry or develop something completely different.

What is fascinating about this story is that the vision of one person, supported by the efforts of clergy and laity together, is what is making a difference.

May we all be open to what God can do through us or in spite of us.

As we celebrate Independence Day, may we also ask ourselves what it means to be a baptized Christian in a nation whose Pledge of Allegiance describes our nation as one "with liberty and justice for all" the people of

God?

Have a joyful Fourth of July!

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sudarshana", with a horizontal line underneath it.

Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar

Transformed by the Holy Spirit, united in trust,
we will **boldly** proclaim Christ to the world.