

Beatrice Ekwa Ekoko

Garden of Believers

FACE FLUSHED from weeding under the warm sun, church-member Emma Cubitt stands in the community garden at Hill Street Park, pausing to survey the land. Squash, beets and greens grow in neat rows. All around, fellow gardeners are picking beans or watering plants. This 3000-square-metre plot is the fruit of a collaboration between six churches in Hamilton, Ontario's, Kirkendall neighbourhood, which carved the garden out of a city-owned, vacant lot.

One of Cubitt's callings is to "renew the urban environment and people's relationship to the land." Traditionally, faith groups have fed the hungry, but environmental degradation and climate change present unploughed terrain for action on food security, and more people of faith are working to ensure easy access to fresh, local food. They are choosing to eat locally and responsibly too.

Not unlike the Victory Gardens movement of the Second World War, efforts in Hamilton's faith community range from preserving and canning fruits, serving as a drop-off location for good-food box programs, providing plots for newcomers and hosting local farmers' markets.

Greg Reader, a spokesperson for True City, a movement of Hamilton churches, observes that the biblical story began in a garden, but ends in a city – a city that is described in the last chapter of the Bible as the picture of a healthy human community in harmonious relationship with the rest of creation.

A freelance writer, Beatrice Ekwa Ekoko works with Greening Sacred Spaces – a collaboration between Faith & the Common Good, and Environment Hamilton.

For more initiatives in the area, see Hamilton Eat Local and the Hamilton Fruit Tree Project.

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