

### Five Years to Germinate— Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

*Our suburban church has property. It was a wooded and overgrown field with lots of brush—and it's taken lots of hours and dedicated volunteers to get to the point for it to be a garden.*

“God planted the seed in our hearts for the Abiding Harvest Community Garden in 2009, but it didn't appear until 2014—it was germinating,” said EarthKeeper Brenda Nickels of her church's project in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. It took two years just to get the site prepared utilizing the “Back to Eden” permaculture method—which involves the use of mulch as soil protection, reducing the need for weeding and daily watering. Brenda's church, Abiding Harvest UMC, received wood chip donations from local tree services.

Brenda participated in the EarthKeeper training in 2017 and says it helped her with leadership of

the garden. “It was good training,” she said, “and it put me in connection with like-minded, mission-minded people who are also concerned with sustainability and being good stewards of the earth. I keep in touch with the network as much as I can through Facebook.”

In addition to the garden, Abiding Harvest UMC also started composting—both its own food scraps from the breakfast café it runs on Sundays and from individuals and community members who dump food scraps in the compost bin in the church's parking lot. Compost made from the food scraps ends up in the garden. It will take about three years for the garden to mature and produce better yields, but even in its first year, Abiding Harvest donated fresh produce to a local food pantry.

While Brenda grew up on a farm, gardening did not become something she really enjoyed until later in life. “Growing things at my home from seed, I realized, even in our

own backyards, there is food insecurity. As a church blessed with land, I wanted us to be good stewards. God provided for every detail of this project. My heart is to share God's love with others and do it in a way that blesses both our bodies and souls.”

In another conservation effort, Abiding Harvest UMC has turned the parking lot median into a Monarch Waystation. Members planted milkweed for migrating monarchs. Brenda says some of the members are raising monarchs from eggs.

“But the main thing,” Brenda points out, “is that God is glorified through all this and people are blessed. We have great hopes this year of doubling our yield. Some Tulsa 9th grade students contacted me about doing an AP project in the garden, and others outside our church are coming. Veggies are the bonus; relationships and inviting others to participate in the process—that's the blessing.”



Student Laura Bryan plants seeds for a summer harvest in the Abiding Harvest Community Garden in Oklahoma. PHOTO: EMORY BRYAN

### You Need a Critical Mass— Arlington, Virginia

*I was on the board of directors of Arlington Thrive for six years. I noticed that the low-income people we met during crises tended to have energy bills much higher than they should be—because of astonishing leaks in apartments.*

Jill Barker of Arlington, Virginia, has worked as an energy attorney for 30 years in private practice representing clients before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C. From 2009 to 2015, she served on the board of directors of Arlington Thrive, a nonprofit agency that delivers same-day emergency funds to people in crisis. While on the board, Jill was instrumental in creating a partnership