

International Partnership Inspires Water Stewardship:

Local Partnerships Nurture and Guide

Background

Milwaukie Presbyterian Church (MPC) is located in downtown Milwaukie, a suburb in the southeast Portland metropolitan area. Built in the 1950s, the church was once filled with families. Now the 250-member congregation is still spread evenly across all ages but smaller. The congregation considers itself progressive with an “our doors are open to all” mission statement; many members are currently working in or retired from the helping professions---teaching, social work, ministry, nursing.



Faithful MPC Volunteers

The 1 ½ acres of upper church property (once a cabbage farm) holds the sanctuary, education rooms, and parking lot. The remaining 3 ½ acres descends down a steep slope into wetlands that border Kellogg Lake. The creek was dammed in the 1880s to form a reservoir for turning the waterwheel of a flour mill. That earthen dam was replaced in the 1930s with a concrete one that is part of a bridge on McLoughlin Blvd over the outlet into the Willamette River, three blocks from the church.

Mission Partnership Sparks Water Stewardship Project

MPC is a member of the Presbytery of the Cascades’ Joining Hands Mission Partnership -a three-way partnership between the Presbytery, the Presbyterian Hunger Program and a grassroots social justice network in Bolivia that is working on the root causes of environmental problems, primarily water pollution from the runoff of mines. Since the Bolivians have extreme issues around clean drinking water, we were surprised when our South American partners asked us, “What are your water problems?” In response, the seven Cascades Joining Hands churches decided to learn about water issues in their regions.



After considering the Columbia River, then the Willamette, MPC settled on finding out about Kellogg Creek, literally in our own backyard. Since none of our local church committee members knew much about Kellogg Creek/Lake, we chose an experiential approach to learn about the watershed. With other congregants also participating, we held hikes along the entire watershed, learned about the geological history of the area, canoed the lake, and researched the settlement of the area. Warren Aney, from Cascade’s Eco Justice Team, led a water-testing day for church children.

At the same time we discovered the City of Milwaukie was seeking funding to breach the dam, re-form the creek, and restore the salmon runs. Coho salmon once swam in large runs up the creek, but now the water was too shallow, warm and polluted for migration.

And, we walked our church's property. A fence had been built along the back of the parking lot with a locked gate and No Trespassing signs. Invasive Himalayan Blackberry vines dominated in the upper, open slope. Yard debris and garbage had been dumped down the hillside. We found the trail an Eagle Scout from our church had built 24 years before, the steps now crumbling, the bridge broken. Long time members remembered that Sunday School classes were once held down by the lake years ago, but now the property was so overgrown it took us two hours of wading through the brush to reach the lake. We stumbled onto two natural springs that flowed from our property and a small pond. But the oaks, maples, and cottonwood trees overhead were being strangled by ivy and clematis. We realized that one of the last remaining wild areas in Milwaukie was dying on our wetlands.

If You Only Do One Thing.....

What to do seemed daunting. We started with no master outline. The plan has evolved in God's time, revealed to us by non-church going people in the greater Milwaukie/Portland community.

Following the maxim---If you ask enough people, "Who can help us?", a name will rise to the surface---we solicited from the city, environmental groups, and community leaders recommendations of someone to give us advice. The common consensus was Chris Runyard, an environmentalist who owns Happy Fish Landscape Restoration and is a private contractor for small projects with Soil and Water Districts and municipalities. He organized an all-volunteer group, "the Tsunamis," that has worked on restoration projects along Mt. Scott Creek (a feeder into Kellogg). We learned that three years before with MPC's permission the Tsunamis had cut/sawed huge vines of ivy off our trees and attacked the Japanese Knotweed.



Now all the invasive plants were growing back. Chris stood at the top of the property and pointed to a native white oak, completely covered in clematis. "That tree's going to die soon, and that will be sad because only 30% of the original number remain in Oregon. If you do only one thing, cut the clematis and ivy."

Our committee vowed to rid every tree on the 3 ½ acres of wetland of invasive plants. But that was all! Three work parties were held and committee members came down on their own time.

With a Little Money.....

When Chris Runyard saw we were committed, he said that with a few hundred dollars he could eradicate blackberries on the exposed upper slope so that maples, oaks, and native shrubs could be planted. When we replied that the church had no extra money, he suggested applying for a grant. Expanding our goal from just cutting invasive plants off the trees to add working on this upper section, we contacted Clackamas Soil and Water District personnel who helped us write a

“Dollars On the Ground” grant for \$1,100 that was approved within two weeks. The grant required a match of 80 hours in work equity from the church that was met and exceeded that fall primarily through work crews of people over 60 years of age.

We began calling the property “Our Outdoor Sanctuary” and developed a bulletin board to showcase congregational work. We held a two-part adult education class that included a slide show of the watershed and our property, along with talks on the geology and history of Kellogg Lake and its surrounding area.

When we realized what we had accomplished, we adjusted our “dream goal” to include all the wetlands. Two of our committee members signed up for the preliminary Metro training for its Nature in Neighborhoods grants and were encouraged to apply. Session passed a Statement of Principles that outlined the expectations for the wetlands and its restoration.

The extensive Metro Nature in Neighborhoods two-year grant application requires a detailed plan and timeline for the work, future plans for maintenance, a community educational component, and community partners. For potential partners we approached groups that already had a relationship with the church. The partner groups on the application were Milwaukie High School’s three environmental classes (cleared and replanted a small area of wetland in previous years), Franciscan Sisters (adult education classes on spirituality), Milwaukie Pre-school (used MPC facilities for many years), Boys Scouts Troop #376 (meets at the church); and The City of Milwaukie. Each group contributed hours of work for the required community match. MPC held a pledge event where members could promise work hours, money, or “in kind” contributions (lumber, designing bridge, etc.). Cascades Presbytery Trustees approved the application.

Then we waited; we had a well thought out outline of the restoration, but we needed money. During the spring we informally continued Tuesday work crews with the “regulars”, primarily pulling ivy from around the pond of a natural spring. The Boys Scouts did a section of new trail that was less steep than the original one and a candidate for Eagle Scouts took on trail building out on the most remote part of the property, the peninsula. The Waldorf School spent a half-day with 18 volunteers pulling ivy along the creek.

Hallelujah! Financing Found

At the end of May 2009, nine months after we first started, we were the only faith-based group to receive a Metro Nature in Neighborhoods grant. The amount was for \$7,800 for two years. Then work began in earnest. Since then we have done the following:

- Completed over 295 ½ hours cutting blackberries, removing ivy and clematis from trees, and pulling some ivy through workdays held Tuesdays and Saturdays every week, with a total of over 30 volunteers.
- Extended the trail started by the Scouts in the spring thanks to young adults
- Held a grand finale on All Saints Day—Nov. 1 with---a lunch after the worship service provided by Congregational Ministries and a 2 ½ hour work period afterwards that engaged 26 adults, 2 youth, and 15 children. Over half of the people had never been below on the property.
- Managed and tracked volunteers including developing liability waiver forms and sign-in sheets and tallied the number of volunteers and their hours so that we could tabulate the

- value of volunteer work following Metro standards. Had our supervisors trained in the removal of holly and non-native hawthorns so they won't re-grow.
- Contracted with Chris Runyard to spray the upper slopes twice during the summer and a small portion of the ivy under the trees. Spread wild grass seed in that area.
 - Designed and build a replacement stairway down the steep hillside that was filled with gravel by Boy Scouts.
 - Publicized our effort through a full-page article for the Presbytery's *Omnibus* and an interview with the Scouts and the MPC Joining Hands committee was published in the *Clackamas Review*.

Our community partners were also engaged in the following ways:



- High school environmental classes use the property for on-site learning
- The Franciscan Sisters wrote an article on Spirituality and Care of the Earth for our March 2010 church newsletter.
- The pre-school took a Nature Walk with the teacher talking about ivy and its destruction. Vacation Bible School attendees did walks also connecting care of the earth as a Christian ethic.
- The Eagle Scout and his Troop completed the peninsula trail that includes a small bridge. The Troop also held a fall ivy-pulling workday. MPC has a permanent person as a liaison with the Scouts.
- The City of Milwaukie asked us to supply a representative on the Advisory Committee for new land use laws concerning environmental issues. That group toured our project. We also have another member periodically attending the newly forming North Clackamas Watershed Council.

Lessons Learned

Now is an excellent time for a church to launch an environmental project. People are engaged in green issues and grants are available. Volunteers were easy to recruit—although they were often retirement age. We will probably hold fewer workdays next year to avoid burnout. However, we had no difficulty meeting matching “work equity” hours. Our committee had support from the pastors, Session, and almost all the congregation.

Seven people volunteered and trained to be supervisors of work crews, spreading the responsibility so that no one person was over-burdened; however, that resulted in different understandings of how work was to be done (i.e. where to pull ivy, not making piles of blackberry vines). We learned to live with some inconsistency and imperfection.

An evolving plan that continues to expand requires living with ambiguity and uncertainty. Fortunately, our committee was open to a broadening vision over time. Not having a

congregational member who was an expert forced people to become active learners about grant writing and environmental issues.

Partnerships are wonderful. That requirement from the Metro grant pushed us out into our community. But not all partnerships work out and they take time and effort to maintain. One of our greatest concerns is maintaining interest in work parties. We found you have to keep giving rah-rah announcements, asking people individually to come out, and showing the congregation progress. Key will be getting more of the congregation down on the property so they will love it as much as the committee does. The All Saints Day activity was a step in the right direction.

Plans and Hopes for the Future

Next steps include meeting the goals outlined in the Metro Nature in Neighborhoods grant that ends July 1, 2011. Our hopes for the future include the following:

- Supervise weekly work crews (except in winter) doing on the groundwork to control invasive plants.
- Look for ways to incorporate spirituality into our activities through meditation and small retreats.
- Maintain a close relationship with our five partners to insure they complete their physical work, educational goals, spiritual guidance, etc.
- Finish the trail system and build a bridge.
- Plant, under supervision, 500 plants and trees.
- Construct a welcome sign to encourage the neighboring community to use the property, unlock the gate, and remove the no trespassing signs.
- Plan and hold a community Earth Day celebration with the City of Milwaukie.

After the Metro grant ends we will still need at least one more year of funding for the work by a contracted environmentalist. So we will be back to writing grants. Maintaining the property will take many years of periodic blackberry cutting and some ivy pulling. A consistent level of involvement by younger church members will be key in insuring the land will be maintained.

Project Expenses, Grants, and Donations

Dollars on the Ground Grant Sept. 15-Oct. 31, 2008

Costs: Professional Services crushing and spraying upper slope by certified sprayer paid for by the grant (under budget from \$1100 projected)	Total	\$ 645
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Donations: Required match for grant 80 hour volunteer labor by MPC members

Contractors donated services for 7 hrs. planning time

Borrowed tools from Johnson Creek Watershed and North Clackamas Parks and Recreation

Projected for Metro Nature in Neighborhoods Grant June 1, 2009-July 1, 2011

Costs: Professional Services spray/smash invasives, cut down weed trees and shrubs, plant native trees/shrubs 157 hrs @ \$35/hr.	\$5,495
Spray- approved by DEQ and applied by certified sprayer and other supplies	\$1,440
Material for construction of stairway and footing for bridge	\$ 980
Native trees/shrubs purchased from State of Oregon for approx. \$1 per plant	<u>\$ 465</u>
Total	\$8,380

Metro Grant (requires 1 to 1 match in donated hours, materials, money) \$7,800

Donations: 1,650 volunteers hours pledged by MPC and Partners

In Kind: contribution of 256 hours by two MPC building contractors to design and build bridge and stairway value \$40/hr

Donation of lumber for bridge (est. value \$ 1,600)

Contributions from MPC congregation \$ 580

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Resources:

Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District, <http://www.conservationsdistrict.org/>

North Clackamas Urban Watersheds Council, <http://www.ncuwc.org/>

Metro: Nature in Neighborhoods, <http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=18203>