

United Thank Offering Announces Care of Creation Grant Awards

The Episcopal Diocese of Alabama to receive UTO Grant to respond to Environmental Justice

Issues

Decatur Alabama— **April 23, 2022**— United Thank Offering announced the grant recipients for the 2022 granting cycle, and we are excited to share that the Diocese of Alabama will receive funding for The Cherokee Heritage Garden at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Decatur. The focus of the granting process this year was "**Care of Creation:** Turning love into action by caring for God's creation to protect the most vulnerable who will bear the largest burden of pollution and climate change through: justice, advocacy, environmental reparations, or the development of formational materials."

Cherokee Heritage Garden

The Church of the Good Shepherd is situated on land that was originally part of the tribal lands of the Cherokee people. Various historical events including the Trail of Tears caused the removal of the Cherokee people to Oklahoma. While traveling the Trail of Tears, heirloom Cherokee corn, squash, and bean seeds were carried to Indian territory in order to preserve traditional foods. Indigenous people modeled their planting after what they observed in creation. The Three Sisters (corn, beans and squash) were planted together, not segregated into a single crop, because they helped each other survive and produce the basic staple of the Cherokee diet. The Heritage Garden will utilize descendants of those seeds that made the journey to raise seed in the Three Sisters Method in order to provide education, demonstration and reproduction of these heirloom seeds for generations to come.

This project was a marriage of notions of care of creation (not exploitation) and the need to put flesh on present day acknowledgement of the people who came before us. The

hope is to help people learn how to produce small Three Sisters plots as a superior and Earth friendly method of feeding the family. Note: there is an excellent piece of scientific and traditional discussion of the mutual benefits of Three Sisters in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book Braiding Sweetgrass, published by Milkweed Editions.

The birthing of the idea of this garden came from an Episcopal Indigenous Ministries book group who read and discussed Braiding Sweetgrass. At a subsequent virtual gathering hosted by the Rev Dr Brad Hauff, Director of Episcopal Indigenous Ministries and the Rev Canon Heather Melton, Staff officer ECUSA the scope of the project was conceived.

“Caring for God's creation is one of humanity's first tasks according to Genesis, and we have done a pretty poor job of it so far. UTO's 2022 grant recipients will play a great role in remedying that situation through the ministries they develop and disseminate to encourage greater participation in creation care. As always, if we'd had more money to grant, we would have been delighted to fund more of the excellent grant projects submitted, so please continue to be thankful and make your thank offerings to UTO,” shared Sherri Dietrich, UTO Board President.

The Church of the Good Shepherd is reclaiming land at the back of the property that had Loblolly Pines densely planted. Those trees have been harvested, so the UTO Funds are to help pay the cost of preparing the land for the garden. Solar power, rainwater collection, and gravity will be the mechanisms utilized to irrigate the garden which will be planted in the Spring of 2023.

United Thank Offering Funding

Every penny given to the United Thank Offering is given away the following year to support innovative mission and ministry in the Episcopal Church. Through the gratitude and generosity of those who contributed through Blue Box donations, UTO awarded over \$1,051,154.14 in grants to address environmental issues.

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The United Thank Offering (UTO) is a ministry of The Episcopal Church for the mission of the whole church. Through UTO, individuals are invited to embrace and deepen a personal daily spiritual discipline of gratitude. UTO encourages people to notice the good things that happen each day, give thanks to God for those blessings, and make an offering for each blessing using a UTO Blue Box. UTO is entrusted to receive the offerings, and to distribute 100% of what is collected to support innovative mission and ministry throughout The Episcopal Church and Provinces of the Anglican Communion.

For more information on UTO:

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