

To all Communities of Faiths:

As you may already know, the Center for Interfaith Relations organizes our city's Festival of Faiths, a week-long celebration that for the past 15 years has explored the commonalities of the world's religions. The events surrounding this year's Festival focus on the soil and how this theme is woven into the history, rituals, writings, etc. of the world's different religions. The Center for Interfaith Relations builds and hosts the Festival of Faiths. Programming has traditionally included bringing to Louisville a large variety of national and international speakers, facilitating community discussions, sponsoring children's programming, music and film presentations, art exhibits, informational booths, diverse interfaith services and community dinners.

Each year the Festival revolves around a particular theme and for the past few years those topics have addressed relevant environmental concerns and the stewardship roles that our houses of worship and faith-based communities play in preserving and protecting what has been given to us. Last year the theme was Sacred Water and this year it will be the *Sacred Soil: Sustaining Life*.

An integral part of this year's Festival programming is centered on how important it is for houses of worship to be stewards of the land, specifically the land upon which the house of worship sits. Nurturing the soil can take many forms such as establishing vegetable and flower gardens, rain gardens, cessation of the use of pesticides and other harmful chemicals, re-establishing stream and creek banks, and preserving wetlands. From this list of best management practices establishing "community gardens" at a house of worship has emerged as a Festival project.

A committee has come together that represents many organizations and individuals in our community who have spent a great amount of time and talent working with the soil through gardening, composting, conservation, preservation, and remediation. These interested individuals include representatives from the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Metropolitan Sewer District, the Jefferson County/UK Agricultural Co-Operative Extension Office, Dismas Charities, Community Farm Alliance, Louisville Water Company, Louisville Grows, Breaking New Grounds, 15 Thousand Farmers, the Clifton Community Gardens, Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville, the University of Louisville Environmental Finance Center, the Louisville Metro Department of Health and Public Wellness Mayor's Healthy Hometown Movement, and the Kentucky Finance and Administration Cabinet.

Now that the Festival has volunteers with experience and expertise that are offering educational outreach, training, and volumes of materials and manuals, what's lacking are church communities who are willing to establish community gardens on their properties to not only sow the seeds of nutrition and health, but also as a way to keep the ground productive and healthy.

If your worship community is interested in establishing a community garden or if you know of another house of worship who has expressed interest in community gardens and other forms of soil stewardship, please let us know. Our contact information is listed below our signature.

Sincerely,

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