



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF
El Camino Real
WALKING THE WAY
THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Message regarding the garden at All Saints/Cristo Rey, Watsonville

The Clergy, Staff, and Congregation, of All Saints/Cristo Rey have announced the new beginning of their garden ministry, called “Los Jardines.” A garden has been in place at ASCR for over 15 years, and the time has come for the parish to manage the garden as its own ministry. This decision comes after a year of discernment, learning, and hard work as we evaluated both current garden management and future opportunities for ASCR to continue strengthening its gospel presence in the communities of Pájaro and Watsonville.

ASCR plans to return the garden ministry to its original vision: a place where children from the Head Start Program (on the parish campus for 25+ years) can enjoy and learn about plants and produce, a place for gardeners to teach and share knowledge and experience, and a place for people to grow their own food in healthy ways to feed their families from the abundant harvest.

Over time, this initial vision faded. Last year, we faced a major conflict with the Tierras Milperas group, who managed the garden and were supervised by the Community Agroecology Network. Despite our efforts to provide security for the property and a safe environment for the gardeners, the situation became untenable. As a result, the leadership of ASCR and I made the difficult decision to terminate the lease. This past year has been very difficult, as we have tried various approaches, including mediation to work out a new agreement with Tierras Milperas and CAN. As we went through this process, it was very clear that the values held by Tierras Milperas and CAN were not the same as those prized by ASCR and The Episcopal Church.

Much misinformation and harmful rhetoric has been circulated about the Clergy and people of ASCR in newspapers, social media platforms, and television. On site, ASCR has received threats of destruction of property. The personal safety of clergy and staff, parishioners, and gardeners is the most important thing going forward. ASCR leaders have borne countless accusations and personal attacks with grace, maintaining a firm commitment to the Way of Love. Their entire focus has been on moving forward with the garden, respecting the dignity of individuals, and the needs of local families. Unfortunately, voices from outside the local community have continued to shape a hostile narrative that has caused pain and harm to many in the garden and the parish who intended nothing more than to do good.

ASCR begins their new garden ministry today. Gardeners have registered, and today I toured the site, talking with gardeners who have been there for many years, sharing stories and delighting in the gifts of fresh strawberries and the smell of lemon grass and rosemary.

It will take time for wounds to heal and offenses to fade into forgiveness on all sides, yet we continue to trust that God’s dream is in this garden, both in the everyday nourishment of souls, and the hope of the harvest.

With prayers for peace and healing for the people of ASCR, the gardeners, and all involved,

The Right Rev. Lucinda Ashby, Bishop of the Diocese of El Camino Real