

ST PATRICK'S CHURCH, WAPPING CAFOD KITCHEN GARDEN PROJECT

“Buy local, but *think* global!”

The project grew out of an initial idea from our parish priest, Fr Digby Samuels and our desire, as a parish community, to help, in a tangible and practical way, malnourished people in the developing world.

Much at the same time there was enormous interest in growing and eating wholesome organic food. Real food that was free of pesticides and chemicals, food that arrived in season without air miles attached, in contrast to the supermarkets' irradiated, sterilised and much-travelled produce. But the desire to grow fresh fruit and vegetables is difficult to realise for most in central London. These two seemingly disparate aims, that of helping the hungry in the developing world and growing good food for our community were brought together when we were given the opportunity by Fr Digby to utilise an unused and derelict piece of ground belonging to our church, St. Patrick's, Wapping, half a mile east of Tower Bridge. Our aim was to create out of this neglected and barren land a garden plot capable of producing enough fresh organic vegetables to sell on a regular basis.

In order to realise the first aim of the project, that of helping those in need in the developing world, we chose CAFOD as the recipient of all our projected produce sales.

On a cold day in November 2005 our volunteer group started to clear the plot. After much sweat and toil over a hundred and fifty bags of rubble and a skip load of rubbish was removed from the ground. Fifty bags of horse manure were dug in (donated by a local stable), one hundred earthworms were bought online and the vegetable beds were marked out according to ancient principles. Even last year's late cold spring could not deter the effects of all the hard work and enthusiasm. Seed money was donated by parishioners and as we had always anticipated getting local children involved so that they might develop a first-hand understanding of how things grow, a sunflower growing competition was launched in March. That first season's winner managed to produce an eleven-foot giant! We saw it as crucial that our city kids in particular should understand how and when things grow, in order that their thinking is not dominated by the impression that salad grows in shiny plastic bags and carrots arrive mysteriously clean. We divorce ourselves from the earth at our own peril!

In spite of that cold spring and indifferent summer, the kitchen garden produced a remarkable amount of vegetables. This year, our second season, we are the grateful recipients of a greenhouse, given to the project by the DIY store B&Q, under their “good neighbourhood scheme”. To improve the soil and help nature along, the parish bought three tons of fertile fenland topsoil. St. Patrick’s Kitchen Garden Project has from the outset been self-funded and looked after by our local amateur volunteer force. Having no experience of growing organic vegetables and taking all our knowledge from gardening books no one is more surprised than us by our initial success!

Since our first produce sale, just over a year ago on 11th June 2006 we have raised, thanks to the generosity of parishioners and supporters, over **£1,000** for CAFOD. This excites us all as CAFOD, for as little as £5.50 can pay for a subsistence farmer in the Philippines to attend a course in sustainable and organic farming methods, for £32 provide a vet for a month in the Congo and buy a cow for £160 for a family in sub-Saharan Africa.* Such gifts can radically alter life’s chances. And to think that this might come from the proceeds of a plot of land that measures just some forty feet by twenty-five!

So there is a sweet symmetry and an irony in all this...here are we, in the centre of the richest city of one of the wealthiest nations on earth, having the luxury of growing organic, chemical-free produce, in order to help those in the developing world who know little of luxury but know a lot about hunger and need. But thanks to CAFOD’S invaluable help we see it as a *Win! Win!* situation . It seems that you *can* have your chard and eat it! As we say in Wapping, “Buy local, but *think global!*”.

St Patrick’s Kitchen Garden Project would be pleased to hear from similar projects or to give advice to anyone wishing to start up their own.

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*CAFOD figures