

Creating your own Peace Garden

Giving life to peace

Peace gardens are a great way of bringing communities together to plan, work and care for a common project for the enjoyment of all.

They help us to think of what peace could mean, look like, feel like, when we start to consider the shape, colour, types of plants, symbols, messages, spaces we want to create in our own Peace Garden.

They help us to consider our immediate environment. Does it nurture growth and healing? Does it invite people and nature to come together? Does it create opportunities for learning how we can care for the earth and one another?



Pupils from St Joseph's school, Harrow, with the stones they painted and sunk into a path in their Peace Garden

Why?

- To offer a space of quiet where people can go when injured or to offer reconciliation to one another .
- To remember those who have suffered or died through violence.
- To create a place of celebration / commemoration of people in the community who have given meaning to unity, forgiveness or peacemaking.
- To make a 'teaching' space where peace is explored in nature and where symbols of peace can be created through sculptures, art, music, story-telling.
- To make a place where 'leaver' pupils create messages or symbols of their hopes for peace to leave younger pupils.
- To build cooperation between a school, local church and neighbourhood - involving the whole community.
- To create a sustainable space that needs to be cared for brings us into contact with the cycles of nature.
- To create a place where food can be grown and shared with the community

Support resources

- **St Joseph's School Peace Garden** - Article on Pax Christi supported school garden by Ellen Teague
- **The Stone Garden** - Story and Project by Celia Eccleston

From the Pax Christi office

- **Painting stones and symbols of Reconciliation** - by Sr Sheila Gosney rjm and Ellen Teague
- **Sheet with symbols and the word 'peace' in different languages**



Getting started - a checklist

- ✓ Who is this project for?
- ✓ Who will be involved in making it happen and who will benefit from it?
- ✓ What is the distinct “peace” message or theme that you want to communicate through this project?
- ✓ Is the project linked to an event, anniversary, or incident that might be an annual focus for a gathering?
- ✓ How will you ensure the full integration of the peace theme in your garden?
- ✓ What space do you have and how do you plan to use it? (Seeing the space or area from a bird’s eye view will help you to think of proportion, shape of paths or flower beds, etc).
- ✓ How will you go about involving people in your school or parish community?
- ✓ What skills/practical/material/financial resources do you have available... and what do you need to find?
- ✓ How will you fund the project? Asking for help and goods in kind? Suitable sponsorship? Grants? (see below)

Where?

- On a piece of waste-ground or unused land on a school or parish site.
- In a quad or courtyard of a school or church building. If space is limited it could be a corner garden using tubs, baskets and wall space.
- As a part of an established garden on a school or parish site.

Support and help

The **Association of Gardens Trusts** (AGT) has an excellent website. Anyone seeking assistance on garden and landscape education matters should contact Juliet Wilmot, the AGT Schools Education Adviser at The Garden Lodge, Chittoe, Chippenham SN15 2EW phone 01380 850314 email: juliet.wilmot@zeronet.co.uk They also offer a list of possible **funding sources** www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

Quiet Garden Trust aims to “initiate and resource a network of local opportunities for prayer, silence, reflection and the appreciation of beauty” www.quietgarden.co.uk/

Growing Schools case studies of school garden projects www.growingschools.org.uk

Making a Small Garden by Geoffrey K. Coombs and Keith Rushforth. Cassell for The Royal Horticultural Society. ISBN 0-304-32042-0



Walls, stones and murals...

The planning and design of a garden is itself a work of art. Pax Christi knows of number of Peace Garden projects that have developed art work as part of the project.

- Stone Garden project. From an experience of bullying Pax Christi member Celia Eccleston created a story where stones that were “thrown” in anger became stones bearing messages of peace. These were then used to create a Stone Garden in an inner-city school. (Story attached)
- In two school-related projects the leavers’ year spent time considering what peace meant to them. They were asked to paint the message or symbol on stones or large pebbles and these were cemented into a “leavers” path, created within the school peace garden.
- Pax Christi partners in Bethlehem live behind a huge ugly wall. In some places people have tried to make the wall look less frightening by decorating it with lovely paintings. (See above)
- St Mellitus parish in London created a peace garden under the war memorial outside the church. Local schools made a mosaic dove and decorated stones for the flower bed. The annual Remembrance Sunday service is held there and the garden reminds everyone that the best way to honour those who die in wars is to work for peace.
- The Peace Pledge Union believe that envisaging a world without violence is an essential step on the journey towards a more peaceful world - for adults and children alike. They have produced a simple guide to painting your own peace mural and suggestions for peace mural themes. This can be downloaded at <http://www.ppu.org.uk/mural/>

St Joseph's School Peace Garden

By Ellen Teague

The Year 6 leavers of St Joseph's primary school in Harrow were asked to paint stones, illustrating symbols or images of peace. This was to commemorate the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. Images produced by the children, after significant education work and discussion, included white doves (symbols of peace), rainbows (representing the covenant with creation), the cross (Jesus as peacemaker) and the nuclear disarmament logo.

Discussion then arose about a suitable location to accommodate these and the painted stones of future leavers. A neglected area in the school grounds was selected for a "Peace Garden" and a working group of parents and teachers took on responsibility for the project. The Christian Peace Education Fund was amongst the groups that gave financial support. The completed garden was opened on the feast of Corpus Christi, incorporating the painted stones of three years of school leavers. Anne Burke of Pax Christi spoke at the opening.

The peace garden reminds the children of St Joseph's that gardens have a special place in Christian experience. The gardens of Eden and Gethsemane represent turning points for humanity - the work of creation in Eden was completed by the work of redemption in Gethsemane and the garden where Jesus walked after the Resurrection. It reminds children of the spiritual dimension to their lives. Two main areas - the water feature and a millstone - remind them of their Baptism (water) and the Eucharist (bread). The garden also encourages children to reflect on the importance of God's creation and care for the environment.

At the entrance to the garden is a plaque carrying the school prayer. Two stones, embedded in the path that holds the stones from the Year 6 leavers, come from the island of Iona in Scotland and carry Celtic symbols of the Cross and the Trinity. Newly planted trees include a cherry tree - a Japanese peace symbol for the victims of nuclear bombs, and an oak tree - which supports a larger number of different species (up to 284) than any other British tree. An apple tree reminds of the fruitfulness of creation and recalls an old Christmas carol where Jesus is compared to an apple tree. A white peace lily grows at the entrance and buddleia is already attracting the local butterfly population. A large gazebo provides a shaded area, and spiritual and educational opportunities have been enhanced for the children and teachers of the school.

The original idea for producing peace stones came from Pax Christi member, Celia Eccleston of Salford and was used by the Coldfall School in Haringey, London - and it seems that peace gardens are appearing in a number of schools. Another peace garden is in the Bruderhof school in Kent which transformed an area of nettles and tangled stumps into a garden of flower beds, a waterfall and sculptures. Amongst the dark nettles of one tree hang teardrop shaped mirrors and each teardrop has the name of a child who died in the Dunblane shooting. The garden is also shaped like a teardrop with a mass of white flowers. In response to the tragedy on September 11 in New York and Washington, DC, a weeping cherry tree was planted and here the 7 and 8-year-olds take time to admire the beautiful blossoms and recall why the tree was planted.



The Stone Garden

By Celia Eccleston

Gandhi once said “If we want peace we must begin with our children”. So with a grant obtained from the Home Office I worked alongside a local community artist friend on a project at our local primary school where I was a governor. The school did not have “bullying problems”, however teachers had reported an increase in bad behaviour in children at a much earlier age, and for this reason we decided to take a pro-active approach. We wanted to promote a peaceful, orderly and happy school community through a positive system of support. The project included all the children in All Souls, Salford.

The aims of the project were to

- Foster a spirit of cooperation and a sense of community.
- Teach respect for person and property.
- Utilise children’s creativity and harness valuable energy and ideas.
- Impart a sense of discipline by following rules.
- Promote the ethos of helping and trusting one another.
- Provide an opportunity for children to consider their own behaviour.

What we did

- A story (*the Stone Garden*) was written to help the children to focus on their own behaviour. This was acted out.
- Children had a one-to-one experience with the community artist to create a personal work of art, which was unique to them.
- The children built a garden in the school grounds made from the painted stones.

The project was enjoyed by all, staff and pupils. The children were able to participate in a valuable learning experience and were also given an exercise in personal creativity and a new insight into their environment whilst working and playing together cooperatively towards a common goal.

The project was not about producing a finished piece of fine artwork. The value of the project and the overall aim was to increase good relationships between children and to change attitudes through a subtle, gentle approach. It was important that the children enjoyed the experience—retaining the message of gentleness and nonviolence that were reinforced through the project.



The Stone Garden Story

Once upon a time in a little place called Weaste some small children were playing on a croft where there were lots and lots of stones. Some bigger children came along and started picking up the stones and throwing them about. They threw them at the windows of the houses and also at cars that were parked in the street. Then they threw some stones at a dog and at some birds who were resting on the croft. The people who lived in the houses were very upset and became angry with the children.

“Stop throwing stones,” they said, “Go away from here”. The young children were upset because they did not like to see the people in the houses angry or the dog and the birds get hurt.

“Go away from our garden and leave the birds alone,” they said to the bigger children. “Your garden,” laughed the group of older ones, “What garden?”

“We have built a stone garden with these beautiful stones” replied the younger children. The older children laughed again, “How can you build a garden with stones? Where are all the flowers and trees?”

“We will show you,” said the young children, “Come and look. We have painted some flowers and trees on the stones with coloured paints. Now we are going to put them in the ground and make our very own stone garden.”

“Let’s see this so-called stone garden” said the older group, laughing. “Then we can wreck it.” They went over to where the young children had laid the painted stones. When they saw the stones sparkling in the sunshine, and the beautiful pictures of flowers and trees on them they became very excited.

“How have you made these dirty stones look so nice?” “Our friend Mary Lorraine who is an artist showed us how, and now we spend lots of time painting them every day.”

“Can we help you?” asked the older children. “Then we can build something nice instead of throwing stones all the time.” “Of course you can”, said the younger children. “Let us all build a stone garden together. “ So they played together on the croft, and built a beautiful stone garden, painting the stones different colours, making the croft a bright and beautiful place to play. The children became good friends.

The people who lived in the houses near the croft came to look at the stone garden every day, to admire the children’s wonderful work, and from that day the little area of Weaste became a much happier place to live.