Suggestion for outreach in the context of Fresh Expressions

To create a sensory garden/seating/growing areas at the front/side of the church which can be accessible to, used and enjoyed by the wider community as well as members of our Church.

God our Creator provided us with seeds and fruits to eat. Anyone could be involved and herbs and any food produced would be available to all (through generous hospitality).

Motivation

Gardening and growing food have proven benefits for mental health and well being.

Lots of gardening knowledge and interest already exists within our Church.

People of all ages and capabilities could be involved in different ways.

Our Church would be seen to be welcoming, vibrant and doing something practical to engage with the Community outside the four walls.

It would create a half way step for those who might initially feel unsure about coming inside the Church building.

Conversations may naturally arise with passers-by, providing opportunities to share info about what is going on in the Church (including improvements)

In a non threatening setting, meaningful discussions could develop as trust grows between garden users.

There is nowhere similar in Culcheth where people would just be able to come and sit to contemplate, potter gently amongst the plants or pursue a more physical activity.

The layout would be accessible enough to facilitate access by members of Thursday Club, residents of Gilbert Court etc.

People who no longer have or cannot manage a garden of their own could enjoy this and the calming benefits of scented herbs and plants could help those who are troubled.
How might it work?
Initially invite thoughts, ideas, suggestions and possible designs from the congregation, who
would be encouraged to support the project in various ways, especially through prayer.
A ‘Growers group’ (Growing Gardens, Growing faith, Growing Church) of interested parties
could then coordinate decisions, in liaison with and support from Church Council regarding
planning, funding, materials, activities etc.

It would be a phased development identifying key areas to work on.
1. Initially create a (permeable) hard standing area in front of the church near the door, with
   seating and raised beds containing textured, scented herbs and flowers.
   This should have enough space for extra chairs, table, sunbrella/gazebo for socialising on
   warm days.
2. Plant some fruit bushes. eg. raspberries, blackcurrants and strawberries.
3. Plant veg that grow quite quickly and are easily harvested eg. peas, beans, spinach, salad.
4. Assess and identify plots for future projects.
Garden could be accessed anytime, not needing prearranged times or constant supervision
but group sessions could sometimes be arranged for bigger jobs.

Further potential
Satellite growers (less active) could plant and nurture a few seeds at home.
Different groups (UOs) could look after specified smaller plots, perhaps on a rota basis.
Youngsters could grow biggest sunflower, design and build bug hotels, bird feeders etc.

Technicalities, funding, materials
Main expenditure - hard standing area/raised beds. Explore grants, private financial contributions?
Invite donations of pre-loved tools, garden furniture, plants, seeds, approach local businesses.
Maybe virtual gifts? (Instead of ‘Buy a goat’, provide a bag of compost, trowel, seeds, etc!)
Make links with other food growing organisations, research community gardens for guidance and
to ensure any necessary legalities are observed. Check for underground pipe work and drains etc.

Possible concerns
There will no doubt be concerns about there not being enough helpers, insufficient resources, missing
tools, waning interest, possible damage to the church or garden or its failure to thrive.

However, there is a great potential, not only for promoting general well being, encouraging
healthy eating, exercise and relaxation, but also for reaching out to share God’s love with
our Community. No doubt problems will arise and teething troubles are to be accepted but,
if it is God’s will, He will be with us in every spadeful of soil we dig and every seed we plant.

Janette and Ashley Hutchinson