



# Creating A Garden Sanctuary

*Memorial Garden/Fellowship Patio/Outdoor Worship/Labyrinth*

**First United Methodist Church of the Saint Cloud Region**

1107 Pine Cone Road South,

Sartell, MN 56377

320-251-0804 [www.fumcscr.org](http://www.fumcscr.org)

## **NEWS RELEASE**

Release Date: April 30, 2018  
Contact Person: William Meier 320-291-6033 [williamfmeier28@gmail.com](mailto:williamfmeier28@gmail.com)  
Title: **“Church to Create a Unique Garden”**

Following its move from downtown Saint Cloud to Sartell in 2013, First United Methodist Church has sought to live out its ministry to the whole region and practice good stewardship of its large property. Developing a master plan for the western portion of the campus with landscape architect, Jennifer Germain, the church now has embarked on creating a multi-faceted “Garden Sanctuary” that will include a memorial garden where cremains will be interred, a large patio with a wood-fired bread oven, outdoor worship and concert space, and a labyrinth.

Speaking about the labyrinth, Diana Klisch, a member of the Memorial Garden Committee, said “We want to continue to offer this spiritual growth tool as we did at our downtown location. This setting will now be surrounded by the prairie, where the songs of many birds, including meadow larks and the call of Sandhill cranes can be heard. The contemplative walking of the labyrinth won't be hindered by the noise and bustle of nearby traffic, as it was before.”

Announcement of the plan and fundraising efforts occurred Sunday, April 29<sup>th</sup>. The goal for the Garden campaign is \$250,000. Anonymous donors have offered matching gifts up to \$80,000 towards the goal already. The garden project is divided into three construction phases; groundwork & hardscape, landscape (plants), and furnishings and completion of the labyrinth.

The ministries envisioned by this project include activities such as outdoor worship, concerts, meals from the bread oven, receptions, weddings, and spiritual growth and renewal.

Additionally, the Memorial Garden part of the project is designed for the interment of ashes in an economical and ecological responsible alternative to traditional burial practices. Ashes will be interred either by burying directly into the earth in the formal garden area, or in the unique offering of “prairie scattering” in the restored prairie grass section of the garden. “I’m not aware of any scattering gardens in central Minnesota, and can find only one other prairie scattering option and that is in Missouri,” Bill Meier, co-chair of the Memorial Garden Committee said. “We believe that many people’s loving connection with nature, faith, and specifically the prairie will be an appealing option for the final disposition of their cremains.” Names of those memorialized in the garden will be engraved upon a granite memorial wall. “Having a specific location to mark and remember a person’s life, even if you don’t visit it often, seems to be vitally important to people. Knowing that that location is a place of beauty, peace, and dignity as well as a living part of a faith-community’s life makes it all the more meaningful” said co-chair, Jill Haak.

“One of our goals in creating this space is to minister to all people, not just our church community. Therefore, it has no membership or affiliation requirements. Anyone can have their cremains interred in the garden. The other part of ministering to all people is keeping the cost down. The fee for interment and/or inscription is \$1,000, which is significantly less prohibitive than traditional practices that involve paying for a cemetery plot, vault, casket, headstones, and opening and closing fees,” Bill Meier said.

Another goal concern the Memorial Garden Committee has is to offer an ecologically minded option. The team found that typical burial plots take about 21 square feet of space in perpetuity. Knowing that the availability of arable soil upon the earth is shrinking rapidly as it is being consumed by development, desertification, rising oceans, and agriculturally depleted topsoil, they concluded that even cubical columbarium settings for cremains would limit the potential of the garden; therefore, they opted to offer the two settings of burial into the soil directly and prairie scattering. Team member Cathy Danzl said, “Our Memorial Garden has a nearly unlimited potential in terms of the number of persons to be interred and remembered.”

The Memorial Garden will be found on the western edge of the campus within a restored native prairie and will include large and small trees for beauty and some shade. The formal gardens (where ashes are placed in the earth directly) are surrounding a paved circular gathering area, the western side of which is bordered by the memorial wall. Just beyond this wall to the west is the “Prairie scattering” section of the memorial garden. Interment of ashes would normally be done during the warmer months; however, provisions will be made for burial during the winter months as well if that is desired.

The capital campaign is set to conclude July 29<sup>th</sup> and the Committee hopes to be able to announce a construction schedule then.

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Graphics attached: *(Provided by Landscape Architect, Jennifer Germain, of the Damon/Farber landscape firm).*

- Labyrinth Rendering
- Memorial Garden Rendering
- Patio Rendering
- Schematic plan