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Build A Creation Trail To Connect Your Church Or School With Nature

EDITORS' PICKS

COULD YOUR CHURCH GEOCACHE? ...AND WHAT IS THAT? (HTTPS:// BUILDFAI

> *"God's gifts are all around us, wherever we are, and the Creation Trail can help your community celebrate all things bright and beautiful."*

A School-Based Creation Trail

The natural beauty of St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School in Alexandria, VA, creates a deep impression for most visitors: green space, flowering trees, vegetable gardens, and wooded areas that are home to birds and other creatures. As you tour the campus, you will notice posts set into the ground bearing large numbers and laminated QR codes. What's going on here? These posts indicate stops on the SSSAS "Creation Trail," a way to spotlight and praise God for the natural gifts that surround us.

The trail consists of 14 stops where walkers learn about a particular feature. Each stop includes a prayer written by students, which can be listened to on your phone by scanning the QR code. Our hope is that all who walk this Creation Trail will appreciate its beauty. Classes from the school, families, and neighbors can enjoy the trail at any time.

Helpers on the Way

I conceived this idea early in my tenure as chaplain at SSSAS based on a similar trail at St. John's Episcopal Church in Ellicott City, MD. First, I met with administrators and maintenance staff, to explain my vision and gain permission to build the trail. Then, I identified campus features: for example, an outdoor classroom, our "Kinder Garden," a sundial, a turf field made from recycled materials, and the oldest tree on campus.

I was assisted in my research and the physical labor of building this trail by Clay, a student working towards Eagle Scout. He dug into school archives and spoke with the groundskeepers to learn more about the features we would highlight. One cold November weekend, Clay and his troop dug into the ground and set the posts.

Mapping My Idea

With permission from the school, and a list of features to highlight, Clay, Lower School head Bob Weiman, and I developed the trail map. We created a figure-8, so that half the trail could be walked if time didn't allow for the whole loop. I wrote a description of each feature and included a student's prayer for each stop. Copies of this laminated map are available in an outdoor mailbox, as well as the school's main desk and online (http://www.sssas.org/Page/Creation-Trail).

In addition to listing the stops sequentially, the map provides a path to walk symbolically through the seven days of creation (Genesis 1:1—2:4): The sundial for light, a drainage grate for water, gardens for dry land and vegetation, and ending at the outdoor classroom, a place to rest and enjoy a Sabbath moment.

Creation Education is Everywhere

The development of the SSSAS Creation Trail took about 18 months from inspiration to dedication during Earth Week 2011. Creation Trails are possible in almost situation, and may take more or less time to implement. An urban setting may need to incorporate both indoor and outdoor features, such as a water fountain. In a rural parish, the surrounding fields offer a glimpse of creation's bounty and might include Rogation blessings. God's gifts are all around us, wherever we are, and a Creation Trail can help your community celebrate "all things bright and beautiful."

Colleen Scheid

EDITORS' PICKS

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