

**Mai Allyne – Guest speaker**  
**Rain Garden Dedication Sunday**  
**Water is Life**  
**May 15, 2022**

I wanted to start out by thank you for inviting me here to speak with you today. My name is Mai Allyn and I work with the National Wildlife Federation. I work on a project called Sacred Grounds where we recognize that Houses of Worship are a wonderful way to connect with the community and create beautiful native gardens. The hope is that these small gardens will create a large impact not only for the members of this community but also the environment. We are so happy that you have chosen to be a part of this incentive and that you see it as an opportunity to make a positive effect here in Grand Rapids.

When I was thinking about what to share with you today, what made the most sense was to begin by sharing my experience with you. I am a mother of three children. I have three daughters ages 7, 2 and 9 months. I stay and work from home so my world is very much absorbed in the everyday tasks of motherhood. Tidying the house, changing diapers, preparing snacks... (endless snacks), as well as co-creating a life of curiosity, full of joy, answering lots of and lots of questions and of course wiping the occasional tears. Let me just say that we have a lot of toys at our house. We have been very blessed with toys as our family celebrates the holidays, new babies arrive, birthday parties and the random, "just because" gifts. When I started out and had my first child, we did not have much so many toys... I would scurry the internet looking for

the best toys, the most educational toys, you know... all the wooden ones. And it was a success... now two more children later and we did it! We have a lot of toys. It's all fun, until you have a tired mother, and she is looking at the countless little pieces that need to be put back together and her oldest child walks up to her says, "There's nothing to do..." or her two-year-old can't seem to decide what to do because there is just too much and she's overwhelmed. There has come a moment in my personal life as a parent when I recognized that the simple movement to the outdoors could change my life and the life of my kids. It's amazing how the stress of the day seems to melt away just by stepping outdoors. For a moment the dishes waiting for me in the sink and the phone calls I need to make no longer weigh on me. My kid's seem to magically forget how bored they are, they somehow forget that I am even there and find themselves picking flower bouquets, creating ant hills, collecting rocks and playing in the dirt. Everything slows down and somehow the mind does too.

I think that humans are great problem solvers, which is a beautiful thing but sometimes it can be difficult to turn the mind off. We can't seem to stop thinking about what needs to be done, improved, changed or figured out. But, the interesting thing about nature is that we never walk outdoors and watch to the birds of the air, step into the steady stream of a creek or stop to smell a rose and think, "hmm... could be better." It's something that just is, and it is perfect. It is God's gift to us to be able to observe such beauty... even the quote unquote imperfections of nature are beautiful and maybe it

wouldn't hurt to remind ourselves that we are just like nature, beautiful even in our own imperfections.

A couple of years ago I started a practice where I would go outside and put my bare feet on the ground. I would sit and feel the sun on my face and just say thank you and receive. I took the time to feel the grass beneath me and breath in the precious air. It doesn't matter what kind of day I am having but when I take the time to step outside it is just enough to shift me into appreciation and help my mind take a break from attempting to solve the problems of my world.

I think so often we feel like we are separate from nature. There is us and then everything out there. We've built around us a separateness whether it be the walls of our home, the car that takes us to work or even our shoes. Of course, all these things are necessary in the lives that we live but I am reminded of the verse, "Remember you are dust and dust you shall return." It is so much more a part of us than we often give it credit and it so often beckons us to unplug and relax. To take off our shoes and lie in the grass or dip our toes in the water.

The given name to this event is Water is Life. They say that an adult man is 60% water. We are made of water. How wild is that?! How much more a part of nature can we get? There are many things that come to mind when I think of water, like a nice cold glass of water on days like today or the view of Lake Michigan when the sun glistens upon it. But mostly these days, I immediately think of my two year old. She could spend the entire day playing with water. There is something about it that just

simply delights her. I am often relieved by this because I can set her up with a couple of cups and water and off I go to get things done on my “to-do” list. However, in reflection of this I think that as we journey through this life, we are given many responsibilities and with this we can lose a bit of our childlike nature. But then there comes a point when we are called to remember what we already knew as children just like my two-year-old daughter. A call to remember... To walk outdoors and be in awe of the sunshine that warms us, the rain showers that nourish us, and the rainbows that inspire us.

Thank you again for being a part of Sacred Grounds. It is an honor to be here with you today. I think that when we fall in love with nature it is hard not to have the desire to care for it and make sure we are doing what we can to protect our precious pollinators and make sure our beloved water is clean. These little pocket gardens are a way to do that. I hope that when you walk about your garden it can be a call to you to remember that it is okay to spend a little time each day, especially as the warm days are upon us to take off our shoes and sink our toes in the grass and be in awe of God’s glory and sing His praises.