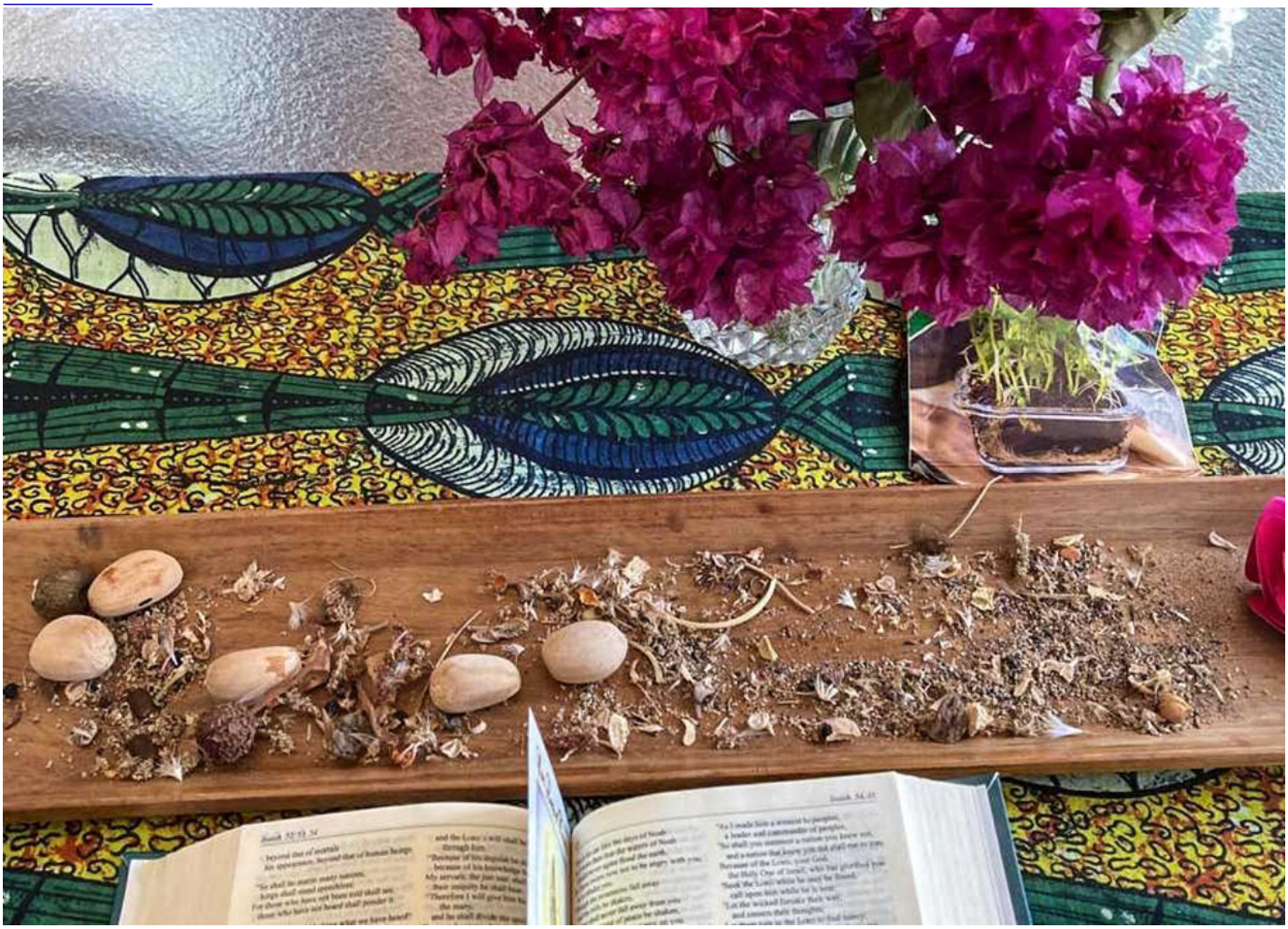
Opinion
EarthBeat





by Toni Rowland

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I live in a retirement village, sometimes called God's waiting room. Rather than wait idly, our village is full of gardening lovers. Women well into their 80s will spend hours daily, season after season, nurturing small gardens. Others have bouts of gardening enthusiasm that wax and wane.

Too-frequent water outages and erratic rainfall these days has led to permanent watering restrictions. But still, keen gardeners will be found outside with their watering cans.

Some eco- and health-conscious retirees promote indigenous trees and shrubs. Spekboom (porkbush) is a veritable miracle plant — edible leaves, drought-resistant and a good carbon sequesterer. Some resident gardeners encourage growing vegetables and herbs, and sometimes we share the fruits of our labors.

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Others of us are keen birders and provide our feathered friends with bird feeders and birdbaths and so offer them and us moments of shared joy. But songbird calls are often masked by large, rowdy, ibis-type screechers called hadidahs that happily graze on newly germinated plants. They are among the less-liked members of our community, but in the overall ecological balance even hadidahs have a role to play.

We are also fortunate that ours is a pet-friendly retirement village. Though not all residents appreciate the canine companions among us, those of us with small dogs or cats understand the value of a pet to love and to be loved by. Unfortunately, not everyone does.



Toni's dog Nessi admires the garden of Anna, another resident of the retirement village. (Courtesy of Toni Rowland)

I am constantly intrigued during dog walks how much interest my small dog takes in her environment. With her nose to the ground, her ears aprick and a friendly tail wag to anyone who welcomes her, she is a "good dog" and a popular pet who, I am convinced, offers a happy moment to members of a community of elderly and possibly lonely people.

On the day before Pentecost, the end of Christian Unity Week and the start of Laudato Si' Week, I held a simple interdenominational prayer service. Some residents from different churches gathered around the Laudato Si' Week theme, "Becoming seeds of hope." We collected 14 types of flowering, tree and vegetable

seeds and invited others to take a handful, plant their seeds and hope longingly for them to germinate, sprout and grow, to give joy and hope in days and weeks to come.

We shared, we prayed and we sang "We are one in the Spirit" and "All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small. All things wise and wonderful the Lord God made them all." Such is life in God's waiting room.

This story appears in the **Small Earth Stories** feature series. View the full series.