Monarch Rescue Project

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has been selected to invite one or more of our schools to apply for a grant to develop and implement a science learning module together with a butterfly garden to help the monarch butterfly migration come back from the brink of extinction. The mid-west is prime breeding and feeding territory for the monarch as it flies north from its winter in Mexico.

Monarch butterflies start out in the mountains of Mexico. After hibernating over the winter, they travel into the mid-west in spring, laying eggs along the way. Some continue the journey north all the way to Canada and New England. Every monarch butterfly seen east of the Rocky Mountains each summer began in Mexico, where it, or its mother or grandmother, started out in April. At the end of the summer, the last generation of monarchs – the grandchildren – makes the trek all the way back to Mexico. The returning monarchs depend on nectar plants in the mid-west to help fuel their marathon back to Mexico.

Today, the annual migration is in great peril, in large part because of the disappearance of a plant that the monarch needs to breed all along its route: milkweed. The monarch will lay its eggs ONLY on milkweed; its caterpillars eat only milkweed. New technologies that help farmers increase crop yields also kill the other plants that grow in their fields. Milkweed is one of them. It is up to people in America’s farming heartland to help replace the milkweeds and other butterfly-friendly plants that used to grow in farm fields. They can do this by planting butterfly gardens containing milkweed and other butterfly plants throughout our country’s heartland.

With the Monarch Rescue Project, NCEA is joining with many other organizations and citizens to help bring back the migration. NCEA will provide grants to each elementary school selected as a Monarch Rescue School. By becoming a Monarch Rescue School, its students and teacher-leader will do research on the monarch butterfly, its migratory life-cycle, its most common habitats, and the environmental factors that have contributed to its rapid decline since 2000, as well as what can be done to protect and ensure its survival. They will use this learning to plan, build, and maintain the very best monarch-friendly butterfly garden possible. They will monitor the success or failure of the garden, learning from problems they encounter to plan improvements in subsequent years.

Most important, the learning module should incorporate Catholic social teaching on stewardship of the resources God has provided us. They will also be expected to share what they have learned with members of their community – parents, other students, church members, and civic organizations where possible. They will be expected to provide photos and digital presentations of their gardens onto a dedicated page website, and to share either in writing or in digital media what they have learned – what worked and what did not work – in their fight to help save the monarch.

Details of the program

The grant program is funded by Judy Wagner, a retired health care researcher and grandmother living in Maryland, who is worried that when her three grandchildren grow up, they will not be able to see monarch butterflies in Maryland’s gardens. She made the decision at the end of 2013 that she would donate some of her retirement savings to help children and their teachers in the mid-west fight for the survival of the monarch migration and learn about butterflies at the same
time. She contacted NCEA about starting a grant program. NCEA is moving forward with our new Monarch Rescue Schools Program.

The program will allow 10 to 20 schools to be funded as Monarch Rescue Schools during the 2015 calendar year. Grant applications must be received by October 30, 2014, and will be awarded by January 15, 2015 to schools selected for the program. Grants of $1,000 - $2,500 will be considered. Each grant will include a stipend of $1,000 for the teacher-leader to help defray extra time spent in developing the learning module and leading the installation of the garden. Additional funds will be provided for materials, tools, and/or plants required for building the garden and monitoring its progress. Applications will be judged by a committee of science teachers, gardeners, and grandmothers and coordinated by NCEA. Membership in the National Catholic Educational Association is required for consideration.

NCEA contemplates awarding second-year grants to schools based on their demonstrated enthusiasm in the first year, their willingness to record and learn from their experiences in building their garden in the first year. The most important criterion for follow-on grants would be the devotion that the teacher-leader and students demonstrate throughout the first year for the Monarch Rescue Project and their plans for further improvements in future years. A disappointing garden in the first year would not disqualify a school for a follow-on grant, provided students and teacher show that they have paid real attention to the garden and its challenges, and that they regularly record sightings of butterflies, bees, and other pollinators in the garden. Schools wishing to receive a second-year grant (for calendar year 2016) will be expected to submit new applications in September 2015.

Sincerely,
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How to apply
Schools must be members of the National Catholic Educational Association. Schools interested in applying to be a Monarch Rescue School should submit the attached application to NCEA by October 30, 2014.

Please forward the attached applications (which are in either PDF or Word Doc format for the convenience of the applicant) to the schools you would like to invite to apply for this grant. Please forward the Application Delivery Instructions as well.

Each application should include the following information:
Name of School
Address of School
Phone Number
Describe your ideas for the Learning Module
What classes would be included? How would different classes be involved in researching the migratory life-cycle of the monarch and in building and caring for the butterfly garden in spring 2015? How would Catholic social teaching on stewardship of God’s world be incorporated into the learning module? What methods would be used to monitor the success of the garden? How would students assess the success of the garden? How would students communicate the results of their learning to the community?
Describe the garden site and your ideas for planting: Where is the garden plot to be located? What are the dimensions of the proposed plot? What is the availability of a water supply for watering? What garden pests (deer, rabbits, rodents, etc.) can be expected, and how can the garden be protected? Who will prepare the garden plot for planting in the spring? What early seed planting will be started indoors prior to planting? What kinds of plants will be in the garden? (At least ten milkweed plants are required.) Photos (.jpg) or digital presentations can be used to describe the site. What role will students play in planting, watering, weeding, and maintaining the garden? How and by whom will the garden be maintained in the summer months (2015) after school has ended?
To plan a good Monarch garden, you can refer to information provided by MonarchWatch.org, a world-renowned program at the University of Kansas (www.monarchwatch.org). Their site gives excellent information about how to build a “Monarch Way Station” garden at http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/index.html. Another good website to help in planning a butterfly garden is from New Jersey’s School-Age Care Coalition. (http://www.njsacc.org/celebrateafterschool/butterflyGarden.pdf).
If your school already has an established butterfly garden and/or a learning module about butterflies or the monarch, please describe how you would expand the program to be more effective, or include more students, or a bigger garden, etc.

Proposed budget
State the total amount requested from the Monarch Rescue School Grant Program. Identify the name and position of the Teacher-Leader who will receive the $1,000 stipend and be responsible for the Monarch Rescue project within the school. Describe the items to be purchased to support the garden or the learning module, and their approximate cost. Describe potential sources of local support (nurseries, hardware stores, etc.) who have indicated a willingness to provide plants, materials, or tools for free or at a discount if the grant is awarded.

Endorsements from school, church, and community leaders
Applications should contain letters of support from school leaders, church leaders, and members of the community (if possible). These letters should include any offers of support (financial, work effort, or in-kind donations) for the Monarch Rescue project.

How schools will be selected
Each NCEA member school’s grant application will be judged on the basis of the following criteria:
1. Quality of the proposed garden (especially the extent to which the plans for the garden are responsive to the challenges of growing a school-based pollinator garden, and the extent to which the plans are consistent with guidelines outlined by MonarchWatch.org.
2. Plan for involving students in development and maintenance of the garden.
3. Plan for integrating the learning module into school curricula.
4. Degree of support expressed by school leadership (principal, board, etc.), church leaders, and the church community for the Monarch Rescue project.
5. Commitment of teacher-leader to the project, as expressed in the application.
6. Enthusiasm of students as shown in supporting materials (written, photo, or digital).
7. Project budget (minimum grant is $1,000 for teacher-leader stipend. Each project will be evaluated on the items identified for additional spending under the grant).