

The Genesis Arboretum was officially started in 2023 as a project of Unity's first Earth Science class (2023-2024). The project was first presented to the class by science teacher, Kevin Haan.

The first step of this project was seeking approval from the Head of School, Director of Learning, and Building and Grounds. To do this, a few students from the class gave a 30 minute presentation about the benefits of trees, where the trees could be planted, why this project would help Unity, how it could be used cross-curricularly, and how it fits with the "Knights Armor and fulfills Unity's philosophy of TtT (Teaching for Transformation). After questions were asked and concerns were raised and addressed, approval was given in what would be a "soft" start. Tree lists of native species and prices needed to be determined. The goal of the project was and is to get the community involved by having trees donated in memory of someone or something. A business partner (Ground Effects) was formed for knowledge of and supplying trees (Knight's Armor: Community-Builders and Servant-workers). Some trees have also been germinated and grown from seeds in Unity's science classrooms.

As the class continued to work on becoming an arboretum, a name needed to be considered. Multiple names were suggested and voted on. In the end, the class decided on Genesis Arboretum.

This name was chosen because genesis means to begin or create. However, there is also a much deeper meaning behind this name. Genesis is also the first book in the Bible where God created "all kinds of trees...trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food."(Gen. 2:9) We would like Unity to also follow in the Lord's footsteps as creation-caretakers and plant all kinds of trees (Knight's Armor: Creation-caretakers, Beauty-creators, and Order-discoverer).

Genesis is also where two specific trees are mentioned, "the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen 2:9) The whole book then pivots and sets the stage for the entire Bible because of a single decision to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1-7). Adam failed and received God's curse of death to himself and all mankind. Satan stood behind Adam's free will choice causing him, and all humanity, to fall from God's grace in judgment. Adam was banished out of the garden and God's presence where it was guarded by a cherubim with a flaming sword (Genesis 3:22-24). Jesus, the second Adam, was cursed by dying on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22-23, Gal 3:13 and I Peter 2:21-25) but fulfilled all the law and took

the sin and shame for all mankind (2 Cor. 5:21). God's grace stood behind Jesus' death allowing for mercy and grace to be restored. Jesus' death has restored life, by opening the way back to the presence of God.

Because of the work of Jesus on the cursed tree, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, and we have the opportunity to follow Him. Christ followers will again be in the presence of God in paradise and be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life (Revelation 2:7). This tree is not only metaphorical, but also physically present at the center of God's restored creation with a river as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1-2, 14, 19)! It mirrors the original tree from Genesis. It shows its health, abundance, and healing qualities! In this way, it both recalls the Garden of Eden, but also provides expectation of future hope and provision from the life saving work of Jesus Christ. Imagine such a tree. Imagine such a place!

Andy Dvoracek summarizes it well,

“It's striking how the tree of life—as an iconic part of the broader theme of creation—stands at the very beginning of the Bible and at the very end as part of the original creation and the coming new creation. These “bookends” not only nicely frame the entire biblical story, but they also highlight the completion of God's redemptive plan. For us, the new tree of life serves as a reminder that God's purposes will not be thwarted. The tree that was lost will be replanted; the creation that was lost will be restored. Therefore, we can look to the future with great confidence and hope.”

So simply put, why Genesis Arboretum? The whole Bible is summarized by Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. All of these major events involve a tree, and our hope is that people recognize this the next time they look at a tree.

Though there were 14 trees already on Unity's property, the first new tree planted with the specific purpose of becoming an arboretum was in the spring of 2024. It was a sugar maple standing about 2' tall. This maple was planted on the west side of the building between the parking lot and the corn field. This left Unity with 11 tree species still needed to become a Level I arboretum.

In the Fall of 2024 Mr. Haan, received the Trees for Kids grant from the Iowa DNR for the amount of \$2,500. This was graciously matched by Ground Effects! This allowed

the Earth Science class to purchase an additional 26 different species of trees for Unity!

The next step after planting trees was identifying them for the public. A very special thanks to DeLeeuw Sign Shop who designed and donated the signs!

As the Genesis Arboretum continues to pursue species diversity and improving overall arboretum health, if you would like to contribute (monetary or physical tree), please contact Kevin Haan at Unity Christian (khaan@unitychristian.net) (Community-builders).

References

- Barnes, Roland. "Cursed Is Everyone Who Is Hanged on a Tree." *Ligonier*, Ligonier Ministries, 27 Mar. 2024, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/cursed-tree.
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- Hunt, Michal E. "The First and Second Adams and Eves Contrasted." *Agape Bible Study*, Agape Bible Study, agapebiblestudy.com/charts/Adam%20vs%20Jesus%20Mary%20vs%20Eve%20Contrasted.htm.

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Unity Christian High School