

## Goat herd feasts on Michigan church's invasive plants

By Shireen Korkzan  
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Goats rest near brambles on May 2 on the property of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Romeo, Michigan.  
Photo: Courtesy of Donna Folland

[Episcopal News Service] For almost a century, cartoons have depicted goats as animals that will eat anything. In Walt Disney's 1928 animated short "Steamboat Willie," for example, a goat eats Minnie Mouse's guitar and sheet music. In Sony Pictures Animation's 2026 full-length movie "GOAT," the protagonist, a pygmy goat named Will Harris, eats an unopened tin can of nuts.

Goats cannot, in fact, eat just anything, but as foragers that prefer a varied diet of brush over pastures, they're great for [controlling](#) invasive plant species. That's why [St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Romeo, Michigan](#), hired a herd of goats to munch on poison ivy, honeysuckle, shrubs, vines, thorns and other plants that have colonized its nearly 11-acre property.

The sustainable land clearing project is a collaboration between St. Paul's, [Green Space Romeo](#), Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, and [Michigoat](#), a Southeast Michigan-based business that rents goats. The long-term goal is to repurpose the underused property into a community green space.

"It's been a really good opportunity to collaborate and build relationships in the community while working to restore the land," Kristin Brewer, a member of St. Paul's and Green Space Romeo, told Episcopal News Service. "The congregation knows that we don't have the capacity to do this on our own, so this partnership has been extremely helpful."

Before the land was [donated](#) to St. Paul's in 1961, it was a large oak-hickory forest. Over time, many trees were removed to make space for a new church building and other development. [Oriental bittersweet vines](#) are now choking the remaining trees.

St. Paul's, Green Space, Romeo and the [Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area](#) are working on a five-year plan to restore the property. Brewer said she hopes that will include restoring a meditative trail that had been smothered away by the invasive plants.

The [plan](#) is to restore the land to its "pre-settlement" state, the cooperative management area's director, Amanda Ruffini, told the Macomb Daily. The plan includes preserving and planting oak and hickory trees while eliminating invasive [Callery pear trees](#).

"I feel strongly that God created this Earth for us, and Earth has everything we need. But it's our responsibility to take care of it and to honor it and to not exploit it," Brewer said. "Goats, for example, eat the invasive plants and scratch up the dirt with their hooves. Their poop provides fertilization without spreading seeds. They're like an all-in-one solution to protect and preserve the ecosystem."

Goats are a sustainable, eco-friendly alternative to machines, which are loud and often run on gasoline or lithium-ion batteries. Using machinery also risks disturbing the soil, which can further spread invasive plant seeds. As ruminants, which have four-compartment stomachs, goats' digestive system [kills seeds](#). Goat manure is also a nutrient-rich [fertilizer](#).

St. Paul's raised money through a GoFundMe, or "Goat-FundMe," to hire Michigoat's services. The company's owners, Jessica and Joe Scavo, installed an electric fence around the church's property before the goats arrived on May 1. The goats stayed at St. Paul's until May 3. They helped clear just under an acre of land over three days.

"Jessica and Joe spent so much time setting everything up and supervising their goats around the clock. Their work is amazing," Brewer said.

On May 2, St. Paul's invited the public to visit the goats and learn more about the congregation. Brewer said she hopes the goats can graze at the church at least twice a year – spring and fall – and that their visit can also serve as a community engagement opportunity.

One idea she's considering is establishing a creation care festival in September, where the community can pet the goats while learning about environmental sustainability and stewardship. The festival, she said, would coincide with the [Season of Creation](#), which is a worldwide ecumenical Christian observance that begins with the Day of Prayer for Creation on Sept. 1 and ends with the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology, Oct. 4.

"The goats are just a small part of the big picture, but this space has so much potential to do a lot of good for St. Paul's and for the community," Brewer said. "This project benefits the goats, the church, the community – everyone."

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