General observations and design advice:

Keep parking from completely surrounding the church, and no more than necessary (perhaps a drop off or a few handicapped) between the building and main street frontage if you are starting with new site design. Even shopping centers have finally realized that people "know" there will be parking - they are intelligent and they will find it! At any rate, keep the garden away from that function. If it has to be adjacent, then incorporation of walls or hedges are more critical to create enough separation.

Use of walls of same material as the building add to general harmony but tend to disguise the garden inside, so some opening is needed to help people outside to realize it is there. This is a great opportunity for a shadow-casting or meaningful gate feature. Trees and can overcome lack of walls, but no trees and no walls leaves a void. Some sense of boundary provided by a building attachment or planted surrounding, seems to be required.

What makes a garden? As mentioned on the main pages, I excluded predominantly paved and walled-in places (that functioned more as "outdoor rooms"). A "garden" is made with floor, sky, and enclosure, but also at least some plantings. If a space could have been roofed and work as an indoor room, I left it out. My minimum concept was that the space may be adapted to the shape and conditions of an available area, but it has to be more than just a bird bath near some foundation shrubbery. It may start out as recognition of a pleasant place, where people enter, linger, or has contemplative potential. But I didn't include accidentally-nice spots. I wanted to find places where someone had marked an intentional path to follow, placed beds or sculpture or added enclosure, and also provided it with "human" vs. monumental scale. Ideally at least some combination of the pavement, enclosure, and planted elements would be present even if some served a dual purpose(general pedestrian functions), or were provided by nature. Besides walls, hedges, trees, flowers or ground covers, pavements or paths (including bridges), there are also often "focal" points like stones, sculpture, water features, and shadow-makers (grilles, perforations, trellises, arbors).

Of all these, I came to realize the best symbol of the intention to invite people into a space, is shown in how often the photos reveal the inclusion of benches, whether wood or stone, rustic or formal. And as I remembered the overall gardens from memory, I recalled that even when benches weren't in the camera view, absolutely all of them except the oriental-inspired one (#13) did have some place to sit, which suggests a welcome to the visitor. If low walls are intended for seating, they should not just be the right height, but also wide enough to be called a "seatwall," This is so important that one set of photos was eliminated because I realized that while the space had been given some conscious landscape attention, it was lacking that essential sense of invitation. It was surrounded on 2 sides by parking lot, and 2 sides by the building, with retaining walls to give it separation from the higher elevated parking, and planted beds in the courtyard between a pattern of sidewalks connecting various lower level entries. The area was well maintained, and the church had invested in a large Jesus statue where several of the walks intersected. But raised beds were not accessible or designed for seating, and it was not furnished otherwise. This area had a lot of potential, but left an impression of a campus-like space intended only to "hurry and pass through."

A remark should be made about memorial features. The photos indicate that a columbarium is often included, and may even be the main impetus for starting a church garden. They are often installed as walls, so they can serve a dual purpose to give architectural separation and display mounted vaults or surface plaques. But in my examples, other features of the design prevented the adjacent area from being completely dominated by them. If a design was entirely a floor surrounded by walls, without plantings or seating (I actually have seen this), it may be serving an intended purpose something like a civic memorial, but was not communicating as a garden.

In deciding what to include in this collection, I looked for inviting and maintained spaces that fell between open sports fields on the one hand, and semi-indoor rooms on the other. In other words, to lead readers to spaces created with a spirit focused on the Garden. What I finally asked myself, was "Would I feel comfortable to sit and talk quietly with a friend in this outdoor place? Would I feel comfortable to bring a book and read for awhile?" Some spaces I found would never have birds or overhanging shade, but they succeeded if flowers grew along the paths or a fountain lent some soothing sounds. An approach that is

too loose can evolve into a tangle of vegetation that eventually overwhelms what order originally was there (like a dry stream bed) yet a too-hard approach (note - not formal design, which is something else) can resemble a walled in, paved space that might as well have a roof overhead since little other than the sun is left to suggest it is "outside" at all.

Where shade is essential (actually, a good goal to seek in any design), trees may not have to be located INSIDE the space if the chosen location has a) wooded surroundings 2) well-placed trees in the perimeter, or 3) tall trees or slopes positioned so that shadows are cast in the direction of, and covering, the area at least in the hottest part of the day.

Harmony should be provided in choice of materials, yet sufficient interest introduced by the details and contrast of the materials. I don't want to write a lot about the elements of design, as much as to just point out that these do not have to be expensive to satisfy the senses. It is also good to include an element of surprise. Even if you have a centered figure, like a large statue or fountain, have some subordinate areas to explore outside the formal setting of the focal feature.

A final note: I noticed that prayer gardens on the internet located in the American west seemed to be more free form, even consisting of rock-edged pools...and asymmetrical designs offer multiple impressions, and don't have to take up more room than formal designs. They work well if the site is sloped or wooded to start with. However in the region of my study, forms have often tended to reflect crosses and circles, even if not entirely clear except from plan view. These fit well near (and between) buildings, besides being symbolic.