

# Ecological Setting

***IMAGINE THAT... the congregation has a sense of its place in the local ecosystems, watershed and foodshed. Awe and gratitude are common responses. Local soils, plants and animals are familiar to members and they understand how to be careful stewards in this setting. Members are aware of the environmental issues in their community, and some are intimately involved in addressing them.***

**Don't forget to invite:** your facilities committee, people who do the yard work, people in the congregation with a special interest in natural history or environmental issues.

**Step 1:** Describe the ecological setting of your congregation.

- How would you describe your climate?
- What watershed are you in?
- What foods grow well in this area? Is there access to locally grown foods?
- What plants and animals live on your church property?
- What abuses is this ecological setting prone to? Name the top three environmental issues in your community. How aware are most members?

**Step 2:** Rate your congregation's engagement with its ecological setting from 0 to 5. A zero indicates life in a concrete box and a congregation that could be moved to the Sahara without anyone noticing. A five indicates regular activities that bring people in touch with surrounding ecosystems, concern about local environmental problems and the presence of knowledgeable individuals who freely share their expertise.

**Step 3:** Discuss...

- How does this setting reflect God's grace?
- How has it shaped your congregation?
- How can your congregation serve as a healing presence in this ecological setting?
- In what ways might deepening its ecological awareness be fun for your group?

**Step 3:** Consider possible actions. Here are examples:

- Church grounds are managed as an "outdoor sanctuary" so that members take pleasure in spending time there, walking, praying or thinking.
- An urban congregation plans a field trip to the local landfill to see where their trash goes.
- A watershed map is posted on the wall with the church's location marked.
- The church grounds include a community garden for members or outreach.

**For use with Mennonite Creation Care Network's Greener Congregation Score Sheet**  
<http://www.mennocreationcare.org/resources/assess-your-church/>

- Native plants on the church grounds minimize mowing and attract wildlife.
- Natural history fans or gardeners in the congregation have opportunity to share their knowledge.
- The children's curriculum includes some outdoor teaching in a nearby park.
- Potlucks include locally grown food.
- Your church partners with a civic group focused on earthkeeping.
- An annual retreat in a natural setting encourages members to get outdoors and appreciate creation. The day includes some environmental education.
- A bulletin board highlights species that live on the church property.
- A newsletter includes occasional articles about local environmental opportunities or issues.
- Small groups help with local projects such as tree planting in challenged neighborhoods, river clean-ups.

