

# eco- congregation



**an environmental toolkit for churches**

Module 9

## **planting and conserving eden**

*Practical ideas and advice to care for church  
grounds and land*

*Eco-congregation Canada is a project of  
A Rocha Canada – Christians in Conservation*

*512 172 Street, Surrey, B.C., V3S 9R3 Registered Charity # 86663 8943 RR0001*

# Module 9 – **planting and conserving eden**

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## Setting the scene

From **Genesis**:

*'Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.'*  
Genesis 2:15 (Good News Bible)

to **Revelation**

*'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.'*  
Revelation 22:2b (New International Version)

God's word reveals that the world is a part of God's continuing creation and that the people of God have a particular responsibility to care for the earth.

With varying degrees of success and failure, the people of God from Adam and Eve to Christians today, have tried to live up to this calling. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, environmental issues are some of the most important issues facing the world. In the face of many environmental challenges it has never been so important for churches to demonstrate their care for God's creation in practical and spiritual ways, including managing the land around their church premises.

### Conserving or planting Eden?

Many churches are responsible for a piece of land. Some churches have a long established churchyard containing a rich variety of plant and animal species. This is particularly likely in older churchyards that have not been subject to modern land management practice including pesticide and herbicide applications. It is important to conserve these habitats, particularly where the church is a wildlife 'island' surrounded by development or intensively cultivated land.

Other churches, often those more recently built in urban areas, may have little more than a pocket-handkerchief yard covered in tarmac or concrete, a suburban-style front garden, or a larger area of land around the premises with little wildlife or community value. For these churches it may be more appropriate to undertake some landscaping and planting rather than conserving what already exists.

This module contains a section entitled 'Putting it on the church agenda' to help churches get started. There then follows two distinctive sections. The first, 'Conserving Eden', is for churches that should manage/conservate their churchyard because it is already a valuable wildlife habitat. The other, 'Planting Eden', is for churches that wish to increase the value of their church grounds for conservation and church/community purposes.

The patch or area of land around churches can be viewed as a millstone, a mixed blessing or an area full of potential. 'Planting and conserving Eden' is designed to inspire and help churches to care for their 'patch' so that it may witness to God the creator and be a place for the congregation and local community to find and enjoy the love of God.

For further inspiration, look at <b>Module 6 'Exploring God's green word'</b> , which contains a Bible study based on Gardening stories.
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### A traditional Jewish story

A Rabbi was walking down a road when he came upon an old man planting an olive tree. The Rabbi stopped and asked him, "How many years will it take for the tree to bear fruit?" The old man stopped work, straightened up his back, paused and answered him, "I think around forty years if the summers are good and the rain comes." The Rabbi questioned him further, "And are you so fit and strong that you expect to live that long and eat its fruits?" The old man answered, "I found a fruitful world because my forefathers planted for me, so I will do the same for my children." And with that, the old man continued planting the tree.

## Putting it on the church agenda

There are almost as many different ways of working successfully in churches as there are churches. The trick is to identify the most positive way for your own church! What follows are some suggestions to help you get going, but you will need to tailor these according to the circumstances of your church, the size of membership and the nature and size of the churchyard/plot that you are dealing with.

**Step 1:** Gather together a small group of people to start to make some plans. Consider inviting people because of their personal skills and interest, their church responsibilities (e.g. it makes good sense to involve anyone who has responsibility for the church grounds!) and a representative from organisations that could usefully be involved (e.g. from church uniformed organisations or a local school).

**Step 2:** Review the area of land/your church patch and, if possible, undertake a survey noting details of plants and animals that are present or use the site (try to include the less obvious things such as insects or different species of plants in the lawn). Seek expert advice if you suspect that your area might have conservation value because of the animals or plants present. Often your local provincial conservation branch may be able to help. At this stage you will be able to decide whether it is more appropriate to adopt a management strategy to conserve a valuable habitat or whether to consider some form of landscaping or gardening project. The latter might involve creating areas that are visually attractive, a wildlife haven, places for contemplation, a safe place for children to play or an education resource.

**Step 3:** Consider some of the ideas in the Conserving Eden and Planting Eden sections, and draw up a set of plans for your site, including estimates of cost and plans for maintenance.

**Step 4:** Consider and consult other appropriate people/organisations on desirable management practices/uses for the site and sources of grants, technical support and even labour (e.g. church body, local authority, conservation organization, local school).

**Step 5:** After consultation, present these plans to the appropriate church decision-making body.

**Step 6:** Gain support by involving and informing as many people in the church as possible. This spreads the load, informs others of what is happening and why, and builds support for and a sense of pride in the church. To spread the word write articles for the church magazine. People may wish to support the work through:

- raising funds
- donating items, e.g. benches, equipment/tools, plants/cuttings
- drawing up a list of useful resources and asking for offers
- giving an item or plant in memory of a loved one
- consulting the local community about the plans
- involving appropriate groups, e.g. a youth group, school, senior's society
- sharing the news with the community through the local press

**Step 7:** Get cracking by putting your plans into action.

**Step 8:** Review your scheme after a year.

# Conserving Eden

## Fostering a Living Churchyard

Many churches have graveyards, some of which have been used over many decades and even hundreds of years in some parts of the country. Churches can work to make their graveyards places of respect where loved ones are laid to rest and as wildlife havens. The following good practices are drawn from the Living Churchyard Project. Although this is a project based in the United Kingdom, many of the practices can be applied to churchyards or gardens in Canada with or without graveyards:

- ✿ **Trees and shrubs** are visually attractive and provide a range of vertical habitats. When planting trees try to choose native species - you could also encourage children within your church to plant some seeds. Take care not to plant trees too close to your church building or drainage system
- ✿ **Compost bins or piles** cut down on the yard waste that churches put in the garbage. Leaving plant matter in a pile in the yard and can provide nest materials, food and, for some species, a venue for their home. Use the compost bin for garden, flower and vegetable waste but avoid composting meat or fish as these can attract vermin
- ✿ **Bird feeders and nest boxes** can be provided to attract wildlife
- ✿ **Buildings**, including the church itself, can act as a safe habitat for a range of species for perching, nesting and roosting. Bats, owls, kestrels, house martins, swifts and swallows are among the species that often nest or roost in and around churches
- ✿ **Hedges** are like the edge of a woodland for wildlife. They provide places of refuge, nesting sites, song perches and a rich crop of berries, seeds and insects and can be underplanted with wildflowers. Native hedging, if bought 'bare-rooted', is quite cheap and many nurseries and garden centres stock wildflowers or wildflower seed.

Local conservation organizations may also be able to offer support: contact details in **the 'Directory of useful organisations'** at the end of this module. The **'Further resources'** section of this module has details of additional publications on wildlife conservation.

**Trossachs Church** is the second place of worship for **Callander Kirk** and is situated in the beautiful Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park. While the weekly place of worship for the congregation is in the middle of Callander town, Trossachs Church is used for a monthly afternoon service and for many weddings. Callander Kirk was one of four Scottish churches that took part in the Eco-Congregation pilot scheme. During this time, the car park at Trossachs Church was extended to provide for people attending weddings. A landscape architect was employed to create a plan for the extension and people from both within and outside the church contributed wildlife expertise. The final result is sympathetic to the landscape and includes areas of especial benefit to wildlife.

## Planting Eden

### Stories from Churches...

#### Sprucing up an alley

*Earle Road United Reformed Church in Liverpool is bordered by an alley which is a favourite spot for dumping garbage. Determined to rid the church of an association with this blight and associated nuisances, a couple of members have made it their business to remove garbage as soon as it appears and to deal with graffiti and weeds. The church has also installed some plant troughs on the walls giving the church an attractive and cared for look. Members have been rewarded with the sight of a grey wagtail – a change from the usual pigeons.*

#### The 'Broken Window' theory

theory now known as the 'Broken Window' theory has identified that if a building shows signs of neglect or vandalism, such as a broken window, then the situation can quickly get worse. Broken windows and graffiti can breed rapidly! Rapidly dealing with such blight gives an impression of the building being used and cared for, which reduces further incidences and is good for the surrounding neighbourhood.

#### In the beginning... by the children of Gildersome Baptist Church

*Gildersome Baptist Church is set in a dormitory village of Leeds and has around 40 members and some vibrant children's work. In the 1990s the chapel had decayed to such an extent that it became hazardous to use and the extensive churchyard had become overgrown with brambles and a focus for anti-social behaviour. The Church took a decision to restore the chapel and grounds for worship and as a resource for their community. The sale of some land to a Housing Association levered in some funding to restore their building. However, the church's first project was to tackle the grounds. They obtained grant funding and adopted a multi-agency approach working with local schools, environmental groups and an employment/training organisation. The following is part of the story told in the words of their children:*

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate.

*For years our graveyard was nearly impossible to walk through. You had to fight your way through thick brambles, stinging nettles and long grass. Once you finally reached the centre, which is a family grave with a willow tree in the middle of it, there was an old settee, broken chairs, bottles, cans and hypodermic needles everywhere. Bark had been stripped off the tree and nails were hammered into it trunk.*

Then God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit" – and it was done.

*We have begun to transform our graveyard into a beautiful church garden. The rubbish and brambles have been cleared away and the Sunday School have looked around the Hollybush Conservation Centre to see their ideas for a wildlife areas. Wild flowers are being planted so that our garden will be both good to look at and good for the local wildlife such as insects, spiders, mice and birds. At the bottom of the garden near the willow arch there is a bog garden which the Sunday School children are going to look after.*

Then God commanded, "Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings, and let the air be filled with birds."

*In our church garden we already have planted some plants and hope to plant some trees to encourage more birds to live in the area. We are also hoping to make a series of small ponds to create habitats for frogs and toads.*

The God commanded, "Let the earth produce all kinds of animal life: domestic and wild, large and small" – and it was done.

*With the right environment insects and mini-beasts can live around the garden and some of them may even eat some of the plants in the garden and in turn these bugs could be eaten by other bugs!*

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. By the seventh day God finished what He had been doing and stopped working. He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a special day, because by that day He had completed his creation.

*Each Sunday we go to church and Sunday School. At the moment our chapel is being refurbished. Once it has been refurbished we will be able to fully enjoy the garden and our church.*

## **Building homes for birds**

*The Girls Brigade of **Christ Church Ross-on-Wye Methodist/United Reformed Church** constructed a number of bird boxes and installed them in the garden of a local home for the elderly to bring much pleasure to residents.*

## **Ideas and initiatives**

### **Planting trees for special events**

Planting a tree can be a meaningful and long-lasting way to commemorate a special occasion in church life. Baptisms, special events and milestones such as births, deaths, and church anniversaries are good times when the congregation can take part in planting. Young trees are usually inexpensive and easy to plant; growing trees from seed is a special experience. Not only do trees serve as a constant and long-lived reminder of the occasion, they also provide beauty, shade and habitat for wildlife. A single tree can offer a home and food for a bird living in the inner city; a piece of natural wonder to a child living in a world of concrete. Planting trees is also a way to offset climate changing carbon emissions.

Eco-Congregation was dedicated to God at **St Paul's Cathedral**, London England on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2000. To mark the occasion, a weeping mulberry tree was planted in the Cathedral garden as a symbol of the role of Eco-Congregation to help and encourage churches to care for God's creation in both practical and spiritual ways. If you visit St Paul's, look for the tree and make your own dedication.

Christian Ecology Link has produced a leaflet entitled 'Planting Trees for Special Events'. The leaflet includes the following stories from the UK:

- to celebrate baby Eleanor's Baptism, an apricot tree was planted in her family's garden in Ripon. Eleanor and the tree are growing together
- in 1990, members of Christian Ecology Link planted an oak tree in the grounds of High Leigh after the final Communion Service at that year's Conference
- to commemorate their Confirmation, a group of young people in Reading planted a tree in the churchyard after the service. The Bishop helped to dig the hole
- in thanksgiving for Jack's life, a donation to the Woodland Trust (contact details in the directory of useful organisations at the end of this module) helps to maintain a grove of chestnut trees in Sussex

What events are coming up in the life of your church that you would like to collectively remember by planting a tree?

Would any members of your church like to plant a tree to mark a significant event?

**Contact:** CEL, 3, Bond Street, Lancaster, LA1 3ER, UK.  
Tel: 01524 33858, Email: [info@christian-ecology.org.uk](mailto:info@christian-ecology.org.uk),  
Website: [www.christian-ecology.org.uk](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk),

### **A Quiet Garden...**

The garden may be viewed alongside the church or chapel as a place to meet God and also to appreciate the beauty of the Earth. The gospels record that Jesus valued finding moments of quiet to approach his Father in prayer. He did so during his busy lakeside ministry around Galilee and most poignantly in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prepared for the hour that was coming. The garden was also the place where Mary of Magdala became the first person to meet the risen Christ. Could a quiet corner be set aside around your church as a place of prayer for the church and local community?

The Quiet Garden Ministry was established in 1992 with the opening of the first Quiet Garden in Buckinghamshire, England. In 1994 the Quiet Garden Trust was established to promote places where people could come for prayer, silence and reflection.. The Quiet Garden Ministry has become an international movement with some 300 gardens world wide with many located in Canada. For more information and guidance about quiet gardens or to join their network, contact the Quiet Garden Trust at the address below

The Remembrance Quiet Garden at Haydon Bridge, Northumberland came into being when a new Methodist Church was built on the site of the old.

*"On Easter Day 1998 as we gathered for worship for the first time, I looked out of the window and saw a mass of rubble outside", writes Dorothy Taylor. "This concerned me, but the church had no money to do anything about it immediately. As I prayed I felt God calling me to channel my grief of losing my dear husband into something positive and turn the rubble into a Remembrance Garden. By our official opening in September the rubble had been transformed into a beautiful garden, with two lovely seats provided by my daughter, in memory of dear family members."*

***"Come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest"***

Mark 6:31

**Contact:** The Quiet Garden Trust, Stoke Park Farm, Park Road, Stoke Poges  
Buckinghamshire SL2 4PG  
Tel: 01753 643050, Fax: 01753 643081,  
Email: [quiet.garden@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:quiet.garden@ukonline.co.uk) Website: [www.quietgarden.co.uk](http://www.quietgarden.co.uk)

## Community Gardens

Community gardens are places where people grow food together or in plots. While many churches have green space around their buildings it is often kept in the form of lawn. Modern lawns, whether urban or rural, require regular upkeep in the growing season in the form of mowing, watering and fertilizing, especially if they are to look good and stay green. Lawn grass is usually a non-native species designed to grow solo over a large area. If you have a beautifully green, immaculate lawn you are unlikely to have many visitors in the form of birds, insects or wildflowers!

Why not consider using some of that green space to build a community garden for growing food? Besides changing the look of your church yard community gardens offer:

- a space for local people to gather and meet.
- an inexpensive method for growing organic, local food
- outdoor activity and fitness to those who garden
- a project that can bring together church members of all ages

Many community gardens reserve a plot for produce that is given to a food bank or local charity that distributes food to those in need.

There are several Canadian cities that have community garden networks, which offer support and sharing of ideas.

## Extending the Churchyard

While traditional churches were built on larger properties to facilitate a graveyard, modern and urban churches are often surrounded by roads and parking lots with very little green space to work with. However, church ministries are rarely confined to the church building, and so it should be with the churchyard. Consider holding a worship service in a local park or green space. Many city parks have volunteer groups or 'friends of the park' who help look after the gardens, and might be interested in partnering with your church for their different projects. Taking a worship service outside and into a public green space can be refreshing for the congregation; taking a youth group to the park for a work day can be a strong witness to the community that the church cares about creation.

**Jubilee Mennonite Church** in Winnipeg owns about an acre of land in a densely populated neighbourhood. The land that is not taken up by building and parking lot is kept in rough grass with few trees. In springtime the field areas is covered with garbage. One year the evangelical committee decided that it would extend its monthly prayer walk from simply walking and praying to walking, praying and collecting garbage. This was a way to reach out to the community and care for the neighbours practically and visibly. The first year saw about 20 people come out. They began on the church property, but continued with enthusiasm to clean many side streets, around businesses and especially in a lower-income housing development, which is adjacent to the church building. More than 10 garbage bags were filled with garbage, and another 5 with recycling. Plans were made to repeat this spring cleaning the next year!

## Wildlife facts and trends

Canada is a land rich in magnificent and diverse wildlife. The sad truth is that the way Canadians live can have a detrimental effect on the health of wild plants, animals and insects. In urban areas, many gardens have been replaced with parking spaces and development has squeezed out many green spaces. Even roadside trees are threatened by the regular digging of service trenches with inevitable root destruction. Within this picture, churches and the land around them are an important haven for wildlife.

- Canada has lost 90% of its wetlands in settled areas. Wetlands are areas high in biodiversity and act as carbon sinks.
- Invasive and foreign species such as the Zebra Mussle and Leafy Spurge continue thrive, sometimes displacing native species and causing costly disruption to natural ecosystems.
- Over 500 species are considered at risk in Canada today. We have already lost 30 species to extinction since the first European settlers.
- Some species in Canada have recovered from low populations thanks to conservation efforts and increased public knowledge. Such was the case of the Eastern Bluebird, whose population benefited from the instillation of breeding bird boxes.
- It is recommended that Canada secure at least 50% of its remaining wild spaces as park or reserve if biodiversity is to be maintained for healthy ecosystems and an environment capable of supporting all Canadians. About 2% of wilderness is currently protected.

These facts can be used as a platform for a discussion on wildlife conservation in the church. Although human development and building can have a detrimental effect on wildlife, we can also do a lot to improve the situation even in the middle of a large city. It follows that if we create a place for wildlife, it will come in its many forms and reward us with its wonder.

## Local Environmental Bodies

In many areas there are local environmental bodies that have resources and may be able to help with both practical advice to plan and sometimes even to implement schemes. For example, naturalist societies and nature centres across the country specialize in environmental education and often seek to work with a number of local bodies including schools and churches, offering education resources and opportunities, practical advice and support.

Libraries often have journals and newsletters of environmental organisations working locally. Check the listings in your local paper for events where such groups might gather, like Earth day events, eco-justice conferences, fairs and expos, town celebrations and even gardening shows! Many environmental groups offer workshops or host information meetings to educate and get people familiar with local wildlife issues. Check the community advertising boards in your area, and especially at nature centres or park interpretive centres

## Further Resources

Wild About Gardening at [www.wildaboutgardening.org](http://www.wildaboutgardening.org) has excellent resources for creating a wild-life friendly, low maintenance garden. There is ample information about gardening with native plants, and also a national directory of nurseries that specialize and sell native plants and seeds.

You can also order their helpful gardening guide: Backyard Habitat for Canada's Wildlife for \$24.95 phone 1-800-563-9453

## A directory of useful organisations

### **A Rocha Canada**

Main Office and Field Study Centre:  
512 172<sup>nd</sup> Street, Surrey BC V3S 9R3 Tel: 604-542-9022  
Email: [canada@arocha.org](mailto:canada@arocha.org) Web: [www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org)

Manitoba Office:  
Box 2248, Morden MB R6M 1B9 Tel: 204-246-2059  
Email: [Manitoba@arocha.org](mailto:Manitoba@arocha.org)

### **Canadian Wildlife Federation**

350 Michael Cowpland, Kanata ON K2M 2W1 Tel: 1-800-563-WILD  
Fax: 613-599-4428  
Email: [info@cwf-fcf.org](mailto:info@cwf-fcf.org) Web: [www.cwf-fcf.org](http://www.cwf-fcf.org)

## **.About Eco-Congregation**

Eco-Congregation is an ecumenical environmental project for churches in Britain, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Canada. It provides free resources, support and an Award program to help churches to consider environmental issues in the context of their Christian life and mission and to take positive action. Eco-Congregation was originally developed by the environmental charity ENCAMS on behalf of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). It is now overseen by CTBI and delivered by a partnership of organisations.

In Canada, Eco-congregation is managed and delivered by A Rocha Canada.

Contact: A Rocha Canada, 512 172 Street, Surrey, B.C. V3S 9R3  
Tel: 604 542-9022  
Email: [canada@arocha.org](mailto:canada@arocha.org)  
Web: [www.arocha.org/canada](http://www.arocha.org/canada)

In England, Eco-Congregation is managed by A Rocha UK and supported by a grant from the Methodist Relief and Development Fund. The office base is at The Arthur Rank Centre (ARC). Contact: 024 7669 2491, Email: [ecocongregation@arocha.org](mailto:ecocongregation@arocha.org) ,  
Web: [www.ecocongregation.org/englandwales](http://www.ecocongregation.org/englandwales)

In Scotland, Eco-Congregation is managed and delivered through a partnership between Keep Scotland Beautiful (an Associated company of ENCAMS) and the Society, Religion and Technology Project (SRT) of the Church of Scotland. It is endorsed by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and is supported financially by the Scottish Executive's Sustainable Action Fund. Contact : +44 (0)131 556 2953 , Email: [ecocongregation@srt.org.uk](mailto:ecocongregation@srt.org.uk) , Web: [www.ecocongregation.org/scotland](http://www.ecocongregation.org/scotland)

Churches in Wales are supported by Eco-Congregation based at the Arthur Rank Centre.