



Church Land Theology: Noticing Your Neighborhood Discussion Guide for Congregations

SESSION I

The plan below assumes that your congregation does not own any land; it is focused on how the land in your neighborhood functions. The session is intended as a Christian education exercise that would engage a broad swath of people—or an exercise for a committee such as outreach or mission. Congregations that *do* own land may prefer to do the exercise for church properties, or do both.

1. Draw maps of the neighborhood surrounding your church.

Provide colored pencils, markers and paper and invite everyone to draw a map of the neighborhood where your church is located. Prime them to think about air, water, land and other species.

The purpose is not to create a geometrically accurate map of the area, but rather, to highlight what parts of the area are significant for your church community. For example, a “map” drawn by an 8-year-old might focus on a nearby playground; someone who lives in the neighborhood would be more aware of the yard around their apartment building than others would be.

2. Discuss your maps together. Focus on how the land currently functions.

You may discover that you do not know your neighborhood well at all—especially from a creation care perspective. If people are initially stumped, go on a walk sooner and save more of the questions for after you’ve been outside.

- What aspects of nature are present in your neighborhood? Can you see the soil? What green space is available? How does your neighborhood meet people’s needs for safety, energy, shelter, beauty, outdoor experiences, exercise or food?

- How does your neighborhood support a healthy planet? Provide hospitality to plants and animals?
- How does your neighborhood help people interact and build community?
- Have you seen evidence of people caring for creation here?

3. Take a walk around your neighborhood together. The leader should scout beforehand to find several spots where the group might stand. Choose areas that provide fresh views of the neighborhood and your church's place within it. If weather, traffic or safety is a problem, discuss the questions you can, indoors or from windows.

- What do you notice about the neighborhood that you haven't seen before? What looks different to you after walking and seeing other people's maps?
- What other-than-human species have you seen in your neighborhood? Where are they getting food, water and shelter?
- Does the land where your neighborhood is located offer outdoor gifts of beauty or joy that your church fails to notice?
- Are there ways your church can address any environmental shortcomings you see?
- How might your church be a part of your neighborhood in ways it is currently not? How might you strengthen the good things it is already doing there?

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