

*Every  
Creature  
Singing*

Embracing  
the Good News  
for Planet Earth

**LOCAL ECOSYSTEM FOCUS GUIDE**

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The Canadian Edition of Every Creature Singing is a rich resource designed for **electronic use** and enhanced with a wide array of web resources.

Although we have done our best to ensure all hyperlinks are up-to-date at the time of publication, any changes to them or the resources they connect with are beyond our control.

**Canadian Edition Design:** Matt Veith

*Every  
Creature  
Singing*

LOCAL ECOSYSTEM FOCUS GUIDE

# Local Ecosystem Focus Guide

## Overview

Please read the introduction to *Every Creature Singing* found in the Study Guide before reading the *Local Ecosystem Focus Guide*. A complete listing of all Local Ecosystem Focus questions can be found at the back of the *Study Guide*.

Local Ecosystem Focus leaders play an important role in the *Every Creature Singing* curriculum. With your help, the biblical and theological concepts in this series will come alive at the local level. With your help, “the environment” will be transformed from one big, hopeless, impossible problem into many small, manageable problems. With your help, people will develop a greater love of their own community and be inspired to work at making it better.

On supported PDF readers such as Adobe Acrobat Reader, the [> INDEX](#) buttons at the top of each page return to this page. Likewise, clicking or tapping on the index items below go to each respective section.

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The Canadian Edition of MCCN's creation care curriculum, *Every Creature Singing*, is free and downloadable.

To access curriculum materials, visit: [www.commonword.ca/go/1054](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1054).

## Advance Preparation for Local Ecosystem Focus Leaders

- Read [\*What is Watershed Discipleship?\*](#) by Ched Myers. For a more in-depth treatment of the value of local insights and efforts, see [\*Re-Placing Ecological Theology and Practice\*](#), also by Myers.
- Prepare a map using the directions below and make sure you are comfortable enough with it to use it in class. You will use this map for multiple sessions.
- Start a file for local news stories related to natural resources and land management. You may wish to post relevant environmental news on a bulletin board or refer to these stories as illustrations.
- Develop good communication patterns with your curriculum leader(s). You will need to negotiate how much time each of you has to use during the sessions.
- You are the person who has agreed to put elbow grease into questions about your local ecosystem, but others will have history and insights that you don't. Review upcoming questions and think about whom you can draw on for help. Encourage others to contribute their local knowledge as you go.

## Instructions for Preparing a Map

*Every Creature Singing* invites you to learn about your region with special attention to the community within an 8 to 40 km radius of your congregation. A map of that area is an important tool to have in the classroom.

First decide what size area you wish to focus on. We are suggesting an 8 km radius because a smaller territory is easier to map and work with. However, your congregation may be widely spread. Scan your church directory and decide whether to include those who live further than 8 km from your church. If you are using an electronic map, you can easily add a second circle of area with a 40 km radius for broader perspective. Some of the Local Ecosystem Focus questions can be applied more easily to a larger region.

One advantage of using a radius circle rather than simply saying, "Let's look

at our town,” is that it forces you to notice areas you might normally ignore: the empty area that turns out to be farmland; the community on the wrong side of the tracks; the swamp that you never visit but provides essential wildlife habitat and flood control. Help your group “see” parts of the area that are invisible to them.

**You have at least three map options:**

- Work with an electronic map
- Use a paper map
- Invest in a custom wall map

**To use an electronic map:**

If you have access to a laptop and projector for your classroom and someone with the technical skills to use Google Maps or Google Earth, an electronic map will work best. An electronic map enables you to zoom in and out rapidly, getting a closer or broader view without having to get a different map.

- 1. Easiest:** Most Internet users are familiar with Google Maps or similar map software. [Google MyMaps](#) provides tools to help create a map of your local ecosystem to share with the class. If you haven’t used the program before, it will be helpful to view [How to use Google Maps](#). Make sure you allow time to explore and experiment.

With Google My Maps, you can:

- Hand-draw a polygon outlining the area within an 8 km radius of your congregation.
- Shift between map view, satellite view, terrain view and several other views.
- Add points to the map.
- Import data from an Excel sheet, such as your members’ addresses.
- Add different layers that you can click and unclick. For example, you could create a layer showing where your members live and a layer for the roadways and bike paths that connect them, and view them either separately or at the same time.
- Save the URL of the map and share it with class members so that anyone can view it on their own or add information.
- Zoom in and out using the tool in the lower right corner.

2. **More powerful:** [Google Earth](#) software is available online as a free download. It will be helpful to review [Google Earth tutorials](#) and allow time for exploration and experimentation of the software once it is installed.

With Google Earth, you can:

- Find your congregation's 8km radius.
- Draw polygons and paths, add place marks, and measure distances.
- Save the place marks, polygons, and paths you draw during each class, gradually adding to your map.
- Add a wealth of information layers that can be tur

3. **Other options:**

- [Natural Resources Canada](#) offers a variety of mapping tools, including [Toporama](#), which allows users to create and print maps.
- Those familiar with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) could use [ArcGIS Explorer](#).

### **To use a paper map:**

Note that maps are intellectual property and it is not legal to copy them without permission.

Purchase a large fold-out paper map of your area at a local gas station or general store. Try to find something with a scale of at least 5 cm per 1.6 km, and with your congregation roughly near the center of the map.

Find and mark the location of your congregation on the map. Use the scale bar on the map and a compass or string to mark a radius circle. Mount the map in an area with plenty of surrounding wall space available for sticking newspaper clippings or Post-it notes. To mark items on the map, you could use stickers or markers. Removable colored dots are helpful; they can be adjusted as more items are added to the map over time, or removed each week to avoid clutter.

The problem with a paper map is that it still won't be large enough for people to see very well. In addition to having a map on the wall that you can point to, consider buying a map for every two attendees or have them bring their own. Pass a compass around so people can mark the circle you are focused on.

### **To invest in a custom wall map**

Companies like [Rand McNally](#) can make a laminated large-scale map centered on your congregation. You can write on these maps with a dry erase marker. A custom map will cost at least \$100 and as much as several hundred depending on the size you want, but it could also become a permanent part of your church's décor. If your church's mission emphasizes your local community, an attractive map is a good reminder of that.

# Session 1: Don't Be Afraid

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

Today's questions can all be answered in class with participants looking at the map you prepared using the instructions in the introduction.

- 1. What towns, rural areas and bodies of water are within an 8 km radius of your church building?** A 40 km radius?
- 2. What urban areas do your members draw upon** for goods and services? What rural areas provide food or other products for urban areas?
- 3. Which parts of these areas do you frequently visit?** Which parts do you ignore, or know little about?
- 4. What aspects of your community are you curious about?**

### Why These Questions Matter

- Participants need to understand that caring for creation requires a basic knowledge of their own place in the world. We can't care for what we don't know and love.

## Session 2: Jesus and Creation —In Search of a Whole Gospel

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

- 1. What watersheds are part of your region?** Are there other natural dividers such as mountains or changes in vegetation?

A watershed is all the area that drains to a common waterway, such as a stream, lake, estuary, wetland, aquifer, or even the ocean. We all live in a watershed, and our actions affect it. Watersheds are named after the body of water they drain into.

Canadian Geographic will help you [Take Action](#) with a list of steps you can take to improve Canada’s watersheds. It will also help you identify your local watershed.

- 2. What roadways and bike paths connect** or sever areas within your local ecosystem? Whom do they serve best? How do they affect wildlife or natural areas?

You can answer the first two questions by looking at your map.

Ask if participants may have stories about wildlife encounters on roads. With help from the articles below, you can share a “wildlife perspective,” highlighting the challenges that roadways present to wildlife.

- [Canadian Geographic](#) shares some insights on the effects of urbanization and roadways on wildlife populations
- [environmentalscience.org](#) discusses some of the ways roads impact wildlife in Canada and the U.S. and offers some mitigation strategies.
- See [Reducing the Risk](#) for tips on how to respond if you should encounter wildlife on the road.

- 3. How well does your community serve bikers and walkers?** How might you make better use of the pedestrian options that are there? What adaptations are needed?

## Why these Questions Matter

- Many people don't know what a [watershed](#) is or understand that they live in one. Storm water runoff is one of the ways people impact the land. We all need to realize that we are upstream of other people.
- Looking at watersheds versus highways highlights the fact that human civilization is superimposed upon natural systems—sometimes in ways that dominate or interfere with the latter.
- The essay points out the ways in which walking enabled Jesus to know both the wild and human members of his region. Walking and biking have health, environmental, social and spiritual benefits today as well. Your piece of the puzzle is to remind your group of the walking and biking options they do have, or introduce them to options they weren't aware of.

## Session 3: Biblical Views of Nature

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

Choose one or two questions to pursue. The first two go together; the last two can stand on their own.

- 1. What **biome**<sup>1</sup> is your community in?** Where else in the world is this biome found?
  - [Blue Planet Biomes](#) See a map of the world's biomes here, along with definitions and descriptions
  - The majority of Canadians will likely find themselves in the [Taiga biome](#), also known as the [boreal forest biome](#).
- 2. To what extent are the plants and animals** characteristic of this biome present and healthy in your community? Where would you look for them?

Greenpeace offers a detailed report on global warming and its effect on the boreal forest regions of Canada in [Turning up the Heat](#)
- 3. What natural areas are present within your local ecosystem?** What do you know about them? What do you wish you knew? Which of these do you and your class members use?
  - Natural areas include provincial or national nature parks and reserves, municipality or city parks, private nature centers, and private land that is left in its natural state. At least the first two categories should be visible on your map, and these entities will have web sites you can mine for information or brochures you can pick up.
  - Encourage your group to consider local vacations. Why drive for hours when you can enjoy a relaxing weekend within 40 kms of home? This is one way to reduce fossil fuel consumption and stress.
- 4. What plant and animal species inhabit your church property?** Learn their names and a little bit about them.
  - Electronic field guides such as [Leafsnap](#) enable you to quickly limit your search to a particular region or identify an unknown species based upon a description, among other options.

1 Biomes are large geographical areas of distinctive plant and animal groups such as grasslands, deciduous forests, deserts, etc.

- You may also wish to invest in some field guides for your church library. [Canadian Outdoor Equipment](#) offers a number of Canadian specific field guides for purchase.
- For more general North American references, see these series:
  - *Peterson's*
  - *National Audubon Society*
  - *Stokes*

## Why These Questions Matter

- The essay for this session emphasizes the value the biblical tradition places on *all* parts of nature, including those without economic value. If God loves and attends to these things, we should too.
- We need to learn to distinguish healthy ecosystems from ones that need our help. The earth does indeed have a voice, but most of us are not skilled in interpreting its language.

## Session 4: Finding Our Place in Creation

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

- 1. Where within your local ecosystem** do participants exercise “dominion” over the land, water or other natural resources?

Mark homes and workplaces on your paper or electronic local ecosystem map. Note areas where participants shop or can vote on land-related issues.

**Simple:** Just talk about this question and get people to name and reflect on the ways that they exert influence over the landscape: owning property, workplace effects, shopping, voting, etc.

**A little more work:** If you are using the [Google My Maps](#) method of mapping described in the Introduction, see if an Excel sheet of your members’ addresses is available from the church office. You can then upload all those data points onto the map in a snap by following the online [instructions](#). This is worth doing. Your class will enjoy seeing how their households are configured on the map, and you can use this layer other weeks with other questions.

**Paper map option:** Have participants mark their locations on your map with stickers or thumbtacks at the beginning of class.

- 2. What entities** (i.e. landowners, provincial governments, developers, city planners, etc.) within your local ecosystem exercise the most decision-making power over the landscape? What do they do?

First, see what you can discern by looking at your map and the land uses it reveals. Answers will likely fall into these categories: Private land owners such as farmers; corporations and industries; individual residential properties; government organizations. Reflect on any surprises. If you’ve been watching the local news, you may also have stories to share that illustrate the decision-making power of these different groups.

### Why These Questions Matter

This session presents a view of human identity that is truthful about our giftedness and the power we wield, but tempered by an emphasis on humility and service. It is important to name the ways in which we do have power and to recognize responsibilities we may not have acknowledged.

# Session 5: Slow Violence and the Gospel of Peace

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

- 1. What forms of environmental damage** or potential hazards are you aware of within your local ecosystem?

These might include any in the following list. In the time you have, you will only be able to look at the examples of greatest concern or the ones you have some hope of influencing.

- **Power plants:** The main emissions from power plants are: carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and mercury. To learn more about air pollutants see [Critical Air Contaminants](#).
- **Factories:** Companies are regulated and any toxic releases are public information. Type in a company name or a postal code, and the [National Pollutant Release Inventory](#) will show you the latest data on record for that facility.
- **Waste sites:** Landfills are designed by engineers and professionally run. Dumps are informal places people throw stuff they don't want.
- **Tainted buildings:** asbestos, lead paint, VOCs, sick building syndrome, cigarette smoke, meth labs.
- **Mobile sources:** Heavy traffic—particularly truck traffic—is one example. Crop duster airplanes might be another.
- **Sewage treatment plants:** These can be a source of water pollution when heavy rains overwhelm the capacity to treat the water.

- 2. What do you know about income distribution** within your region? What social classes live where?

Several online resources are available:

- Global News reports on [the growing gap between wealth and poverty](#) in some of Canada's major cities, and provides a few maps to review.
- Statics Canada provides information about individual income levels [by province and territory](#).
- With grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Council of Canada (SSHRC), [Neighbourhood Change](#) is investigating the impact of growing income inequality on neighbourhoods. It offers a downloadable booklet with maps and information about the [income distribution](#) of several Canadian cities.

3. **Is racial segregation a part** of your area? Where do minorities live?
4. **Can you see any relationship between** low income or minority communities and potential environmental hazards such as landfills and factories?

If a particular hazard has come to your attention, it might be interesting to wander around nearby and ask people you run into whether they've experienced any concerns.

## Why These Questions Matter:

Points 1 and 2 in the essay for this session discuss the fact that poor and minority populations often bear more than their fair share of society's environmental costs. The Local Ecosystem Focus questions help you consider whether this is true in your community. Environmental injustice is something many of us need to be trained to "see." Jesus calls us to recognize "the things that make for peace," and one of those things is fair sharing of environmental costs.

## Session 6: Environmental Disasters, Ancient and Modern

Climate change is a huge topic. If you are wondering what to do with your 13<sup>th</sup> week, consider returning here, or spending two weeks on this session now. If you are short on time, go directly to the last question and see how communities are working at climate change.

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

#### 1. What are the primary sources of CO<sub>2</sub> within your local ecosystem?

Environment Canada has a [National CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions Map](#). Their [Interactive CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions Map](#) is searchable by postal code and identifies the source of emissions in a given area.

- Explore the distribution of [greenhouse gas emissions by economic sector](#).
- [Agriculture](#) is the source of about 10% of Canada's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to methane from livestock, handling of manure and fertilizer, and management of soils.
- With these facts in mind, view your local ecosystem map. You should be able to make some guesses as to the nature of the CO<sub>2</sub> generation in your area. Carbon sinks would be forests, prairies or other concentrations of vegetation.

#### 2. What energy sources generate the electricity in your home and church building? If fossil fuels are used, where do they come from?

- [Key Canadian Electricity Statistics](#) provides national and provincial information about the fuel used to generate electricity in Canada.
- [Energy Use in Canada](#) illustrates energy usage per capita by province for transportation purposes and in homes.
- [The Canadian Energy Pipeline Association](#) offers an interactive map that allows you to explore pipelines in your region, including any significant incidents that have occurred there.

**3. How is climate change expected to affect your region?**

- A summary of [Climate Change Impacts in Canada by region](#) is available through the Climate Action Network. The website also offers news and information.
- [Environment Canada Historical Data](#) allows you to track climate data by hour, date and month for regions across the country. You can chart the data and see how temperatures have changed.
- Another strategy is to search for climate change impacts and the name of your nearest city and/or province.

**4. Are people within your local ecosystem planning for climate change?**

Are there business or government leaders who are concerned about this?

Most communities call their thinking on this topic a Climate Change Action Plan. If an internet search does not turn up any climate change plans within your area, call your city council and ask if anyone is working on this. If not, why not? Here are some examples of climate change planning at both large-scale and small-scale levels.

- [climatechange.gc.ca](http://climatechange.gc.ca) provides information about how the Government of Canada is responding to the issue.
- For those interested in a more detailed report, [Canada's Sixth National Report on Climate Change](#) is available for download.
- As an example of how one large metropolitan area is striving to address climate change, see Vancouver's [Greenest City Action Plan](#). Although the city continues to grow, it is determined to bring community-based greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels. A 2014/2015 update begins with an infographic illustrating some of the impacts felt since the program began.
- [Community Climate Change Action Plan](#) Calcedon, Ontario, is a mid-sized town in Ontario with a population of 59,000. This town's plans include enacting an anti-idling law, planting trees, changing building codes and implementing a composting program.
- [Climate Action Toolkit](#), from the Ella Baker Center, Oakland, CA This town not only prepared a plan; they're sharing how they did it.

## Why These Questions Matter

As stated in the essay, pumping large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is an experiment likely to change the world as we know it. Reducing greenhouse gases needs to be a priority for everyone. These questions lead toward creating a Climate Change Action Plan.

# Session 7: Hearing from the Global Community

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

Choose one of these ways to connect with the global community via your map circle:

- 1. Are there ethnic groups different from your own** living within your local ecosystem? Who lives where? What about congregations of different nationalities, races, or religions? How do you think these other congregations would answer the questions in this study?

**On other congregations:** Most places of worship are already marked on Google Maps, or you can look in the Yellow Pages. Start by reviewing other congregations' web sites, if they have sites. Then make a friendly phone call or visit during office hours. Mention this study and ask if this congregation has ever done something similar. Connecting points might be managing church property for energy efficiency or a local environmental issue that has been in the news.

- 2. What kinds of goods are shipped** to your region from international locations? Chose one or more commonly available products and research where they come from.

**On goods not produced in your region:** This question overlaps with household practice 2, so you are giving people a head start on their homework. You'll have plenty of items to choose from: most communities don't make their own electronics, cars, clothes, fuel or grow very much of their food.

It may be enough just to share these facts with your group:

- The [garment industry in Canada](#) faces huge challenges. Finding out just what is [manufactured in Canada](#) can also be tricky. But according to an Ipsos poll on [consumer garment purchasing habits](#), over 40% of respondents were more concerned about choice and low cost than the effects of poor conditions in Third World Garment factories. Journalist Kelsey Timmerman visited countries and factories [imported clothing](#) comes from.

- [FoxConn](#), the multinational corporation based in Taiwan, manufactures 40% of the world's electronics. One of their Chinese factories alone employs several hundred thousand workers.

In short, the take-home message is that each of our areas is tightly linked to a global economy that has little accountability to any one place and that is dependent on fossil fuels for shipping. You could also skip ahead to Session 9 for more on building a local economy.

## Why these Questions Matter

- We are often oblivious to the diversity and dividing walls in our own communities. An unknown nearby congregation could become a valuable partner for you in the future, or provide you with an alternate viewpoint that you need.
- Canadian wealth enables us to outbid other consumers for resources such as land use. Therefore, our consumption is sometimes at others' expense. It is important to know that we are connected to people around the world through the goods we buy and to hear their stories.

## Session 8: Claiming Our Citizenship

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

**3. What organizations within your local ecosystem are responsible** for overseeing the environmental health of the area? What do they do?

You may wish to focus on just one area, such as: waterways, air pollution, land management/urban sprawl, climate change master plan.

These organizations fall into two basic groups:

- Government agencies such as Environment Canada.
- Non-profit advocacy organizations such as a river alliance, a land trust, regional offices of national organizations like the Canadian Wildlife Federation, and so on.
- [Goodwork.ca](http://Goodwork.ca) lists a number of environmental agencies across the country.

To figure out the patchwork of government agencies whose role touches on environmental health, scan municipal or city office pages in your phone book or on the Internet. Search the Internet using phrases related to the area of environmental health that interests you, along with the name of your city or county. Pick one or two offices and call them to ask them what they do. Questions could include:

- What issues are you dealing with right now?
- Who else do you collaborate with to address this problem?

**4. How does one gain input** into these groups?

Here, your questions could include:

- How are members elected to this board?
- If I notice a problem with XYZ, whom would I talk to?
- Do you hear a lot of concern from the public about XYZ?
- When are public meetings held?

Nonprofit organizations are always looking for volunteers or supporters and will be happy to talk to you.

## Why these Questions Matter

It can take six months to sew on a button or check the air in your tires if you've never done it and don't know how. The same is true of witnessing to government. You can model engaged behavior and help people get started.

# Session 9: Rethinking the Market Economy

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

Choose from the questions below.

- 1. Choose a retail business or industry** that is located within your local ecosystem. Find out what challenges they face in balancing costs and impacts on the environment.

Some businesses are marked on Google Maps, but walking or driving around your community is probably the best way to get a sense of what is there. You can jot some names and then see if they have web sites with more information.

- 2. Where do the raw materials** that your local industries use come from? How are they transported to your region? Could the raw materials be produced locally?

To find out about raw materials and environmental challenges, you will probably need to choose one or two businesses and ask them. Better yet, this could be an opportunity to hear from someone in your congregation whose workplace is within the local ecosystem.

- 3. How much of your spending supports local businesses?** What changes could you make to ensure that the money you spend on goods and services provides income to your neighbors? Is this important to you?

These sites make the case for supporting local small businesses rather than chains:

- [Sustainable Connections: Why Buy Locally Owned](#)
- [The Institute for Local Self-Reliance](#) includes summaries of studies exploring the effects of big box retail stores on the communities that host them.
- [Conserving Communities](#), by Wendell Berry
- [31 Ways to Jumpstart the Local Economy](#)
- [Why buy Canadian First](#)

An engaging way to encourage local shopping could be to bring in a number of household items that people might typically buy at a Wal-Mart or another large chain and ask the group where else they could buy a similar item locally. Do cost comparisons if you have time.

## Why these Questions Matter

- Non-consumption is not an option. We are creatures with material needs. Business and industry can be positive forces. Thoughtful consumption can shape our economy in ways that improve our communities and create jobs.
- A rudimentary knowledge of the businesses in your area could reveal positive qualities consumers will want to reward or negative impacts on the community that need to be addressed.

# Session 10: Simple Abundance

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

**Choose to work on either food or water.**

- 1. Where does your drinking water come from?** Where does your wastewater go and how is it treated? Are there contaminants in your water?

The answers here could be framed in terms of geography or of city government. Geographically speaking, your water source could be a lake, a river, a reservoir or an aquifer. Canada contains about one-fifth of the world's freshwater supply.

If you are on city water, you can follow your water bill to your local water and sewer department and ask your questions there. You might even be able to tour a wellfield or a wastewater treatment plant.

If you drink bottled water, ask yourself why you do. Check the label to see where it comes from. Fiji Water, for example, is shipped in from an island due north of New Zealand. Just think of it as a bottle of oil and leave it alone.

### **Helpful Vocabulary:**

- **Aquifer:** A natural underground layer of porous, water-bearing materials (sand, gravel) usually capable of yielding a large amount of water.
- **Combined Sewer Overflows:** When the capacity of the sewer system is exceeded during heavy rains, some municipalities discharge a mixture of untreated stormwater and domestic waste directly into local rivers. Find out if your town has this problem and where the excess water is released.
- **Wellfield:** Multiple wells under common ownership that supply water to a community.

### **Water Resources**

- [The Canadian Water and Wastewater Association](#) is a non-profit body addressing water and waste issues.
- [Groundwater in Canada](#)
- [List of Water Dams and Reservoirs in Canada](#)

- 2. Where does food come from in your community?** What foods are grown within your local ecosystem? Do they feed the local population or go elsewhere?

This week is a chance to visit your local farmer's market if you have one, or to ask questions at grocery store chains within your map circle.

- [Beyond Factory Farming](#) is a Canadian organization promoting socially responsible livestock production.
  - [Canadian Organic Growers](#) supplies a list of organic farmers across the country.
  - [Farmer's Markets in Canada](#) allows you to search for local area markets by province.
- 3. How can you support the farmers in your region** who are doing the best job of caring for their land and animals? Where can you buy their food?

## Why these Questions Matter

For many of us in North America, food and water are cheap and abundant. For others, water sources are threatened by drought or overuse, and keeping food on the table is a daily struggle. Thinking about how these basic services are provided is an opportunity for gratitude—and for doing justice. It can also make us better caretakers of these vital resources. Those of us acquainted with the hard work of gardening may also wonder why our food is so inexpensive.

# Session 11: Creating Accountable Communities

## Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

### Choose one of these questions:

- 1. What native peoples originally inhabited your region?** What waves of immigrants followed and when did they arrive? How did they relate to the land? Are remnants of these groups still present?

Consider if there are elders in your congregation who can help you with this question, or others who have lived in the area for generations. Perhaps you have people within your group whose heritages represent the different eras of your local history. Your historical society may also be able to help you. One way to narrow this topic might be to research the history of the land your congregation's meeting place stands on.

- [Aboriginal peoples and communities](#) This resource provides information and some location maps for Indigenous people across Canada.
- An [Immigration settlement map](#) provided by Wikipedia, this map shows settlement areas according to the ancestry of Canadians from self-reported 2006 census data.

If question 1 interests you, you may enjoy exploring the field of [environmental history](#). This relatively recent area of study looks at human interactions with the natural world at particular times and places. Some of the well-known writers in environmental history include Donald Worster, William Cronon, Alfred Crosby and Carolyn Merchant.

- 2. What natural resources or community resources** do members within your congregation share? How can the relationships you already have with each other be an asset in caring for these natural resources?

Refer back to session 4 of the *Leader's Guide* for Local Ecosystem Focus questions and note that if you are using an electronic map and have an Excel spreadsheet of your congregation's names and addresses, it is possible to make the addresses appear on a map layer. You could then highlight geographical relationships. Even if people know they live near each other, they may not have thought of themselves as potential carpool mates or co-stewards of a common creek.

Another way to approach this question is to ask what natural spaces people use, what civic groups they attend, what highways they frequent, etc. Give people who are part of, say, a local Audubon club or river alliance a chance to share about their group and invite others to attend.

## Why These Questions Matter

Both of the local ecosystem focus questions deal with the communal stewardship of resources.

- The first question invites thought about the culture your congregation is embedded in. We do not each decide as individuals how we will care for the land we inhabit. We are part of a broader culture that teaches us how to think and act.

Different communities understand land differently and live on it in different ways. For example, the Indigenous people who lived in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the early 1800s and the first European settlers who arrived in the mid-1800s had very different understandings of wetlands. Contrasting cultures and land management practices can give you insights into your own behavior related to the land.

Also note that the original Indigenous groups may have had valuable insights into the local terrain that could still be helpful today. The longer a community has lived on the land, the more likely that it will have developed sustainable management practices. Most newcomers to a region do not understand the landscape very well and tend to make mistakes.

The question of earlier inhabitants could also bring up justice issues regarding appropriation of Indigenous land that your group may not have grappled with before.

- The purpose of the second question is to capitalize on the relationships people in your congregation have built and relate them to the land. If a cluster of people who know each other live on the same branch of a river or use the same park, it provides added accountability and engagement. We all need reminders that others care about our corner of the world too.

## Session 12: A Spirituality that Sustains

### Local Ecosystem Focus Questions and Suggested Resources

- 3. What soil types are common in your community?** What kinds of plants grow best in these soil types? What “root” issues do you notice within your local ecosystem?

This is not the time for an exhaustive study of soil types. The idea is to help bring the root metaphor down-to-earth in your community. You are good to go with a few general observations, perhaps gleaned from a farming or gardening friend. Keep your eyes open for the absence or presence of actual roots in your community. For example, if you see a dust cloud blowing off of a farm field, that indicates a lack of roots holding the soil down. Maybe there is a tree with distinctive roots that you could photograph. Or maybe this is an occasion for noticing the amount of asphalt in your community.

See [Botony: Plant Parts and Functions](#) to understand the relationship between roots and soil.

- 4. What does it mean to be rooted in this community?** What bonds people to this particular locale? How is a sense of place expressed? How has this place shaped your relationship with God?

Ask Indigenous people who have lived within your area for a long time what keeps them there. Ask newcomers how they are going about putting down roots. Note prominent landmarks, ecological features, community strengths, industries your region is known for.

- 5. What areas within your local ecosystem need a sustained commitment?** How might Christ the Root provide that?

Review what you’ve learned about your community from past sessions and open this question up to your group.

### Why these Questions Matter

This session explores the question of what can sustain our commitment to creation care. It also explores the image of Christ as root. Your task is to help make the root metaphor concrete and to bring the larger questions down into your own map circle. What can sustain your commitment to *this* valley, *this* river, *that* toxic site next door? This week’s questions are best answered by talking to people on the street or in your congregation.

