

# Getting started with Eco Church

## Tips and suggestions to help you get started and make progress

Churches can arrive at Eco Church via many different paths: a desire to save money by bringing down energy costs, a heart for identifying wildlife in the churchyard and enhancing biodiversity, an active foodbank and community outreach, a concern about the climate and nature crises and conviction to act as a Christians. However you 'arrive', a good place to start would be meeting your church where they are and growing and developing from there. Once you have completed the online survey you will gain a better picture of the areas your church is already strongest – take time to recognise this and highlight how these actions contribute to Eco Church. Here are some more suggestions to help you get started and make progress with Eco Church.

### 1. Create spaces to grow

Coming to an understanding of the climate and nature crises and making the connection to faith and action can take time for churches, and individuals. Eco Church is designed to meet people where they are and can be used to prompt actions, step by step, to move forward. However, an important part of Eco Church is to grow together as a church community. Spending time learning, making connections, and listening to God is important, and, as a church, you will need to consider how you create spaces to do this; Sunday morning worship, small groups, special services, visiting speakers, chats over coffee. The first step may be to reflect on what you love about creation and your own 'Aha!' moment that awoke the urgency to act for God, nature and people. Remember, we are all developing our understanding of what it means to care for creation.

### 2. Gather a team

Have others around who can support, motivate you and hold you to account! In time this may be a committee or some other structure, but when starting out this might only be two or three people. An obvious start might be those already interested in 'green' things, but don't limit it to them. If you have a youth worker or a fabric officer for example, they can be involved too. As you will see, Eco Church will benefit from varied experiences.

### 3. Take ownership

The Eco Church survey is a self-assessment for churches across many different denominations and settings. Eco Church will look different depending on the church setting (urban, rural, size of congregation, facilities, building, finance, demographics – you name it!). We encourage you to engage with the survey in the most useful way for your church. So, even if the wording of a specific question doesn't cover your exact circumstances or practice, it is okay to interpret and answer it within your local context, as long as you do so with integrity, and aligned with the overall spirit of the question.

### 4. Make a commitment

The first question of *every* category of the Eco Church survey asks your church to acknowledge the climate and nature crises and demonstrate a commitment to taking action. Your commitment may start with a simple statement such as this:

*'We recognise and teach that creation care and action to address the climate and nature crises are integral to Christian faith, life and worship. We are committed to respond to this by participating in the A Rocha UK Eco Church award scheme.'*

There are further notes about commitment on the **survey category overviews** on our [resources page](#).

## 5. Have a go

We always encourage churches who have not yet started a survey to 'have a go'. When you first fill in the Eco Church survey there will be lots you can complete, but also lots you 'need to find out'. However, making a start can help demystify the process and give you a first impression of how you are doing – it may be a pleasant surprise! However, if it feels overwhelming at this point, break down the survey into chunks and acknowledge where you are already making progress.

## 6. Prompt for action

Use the Eco Church survey as a prompt for action. Once you have completed the survey, you will have a sense of how you are doing and what areas are 'easier' than others. We encourage you to use the survey questions and themes to guide you to take incremental steps and make a plan. Perhaps choose one or two questions from each category to help you formulate goals for the coming year.

## 7. Make connections

Even though we structure the survey into categories, they are not truly distinct from one another and the issues the survey seeks to address are interconnected. For example,

- A citizen science action day in your churchyard might primarily seem to be about monitoring species (Land and Nature), but it will also build community (Community and Global Engagement)
- A special service during the Season of Creation might engage in worship (Worship and Teaching), but could also be a space to share information with the congregation about a local refill shop (Lifestyle)

Understanding the connections within the survey can be useful to consider how actions you take might impact across different categories.

## 8. Collaborate

Eco Church will be a richer experience and have a wider impact if it involves others who can be a tremendous form of support and encouragement. Use your local denominational Eco reps or Green apostles as a resource and find out about the networks available to you. Explore the environmental pages of your denominational website to find out more.

An important point to remember is that you are not doing this alone, there are thousands of churches you can learn from. Build connections and gain support from other churches, use the [Eco Church map](#) to reach out to Eco Churches near you as well as groups and other organisations in your local communities (e.g. Friends of local parks, Wildlife Trusts, local council green groups).

## 9. Make use of other resources and tools

Apart from Eco Church's resources and guidance, we have stories and examples where you can read about the experiences of other churches. But we do not have ALL the answers! There are a wealth of other organisations, tools, schemes, projects and sources of information to make use of. Explore our [resources](#) for suggestions and links.

## 10. Celebrate

Since Eco Church began, we have emphasised the celebration of awards, as an important milestone. Equally, we encourage churches to spend time in nature and celebrate creation; taking time to enjoy God's creation is not only an act of worship but can help us make deeper connections from which to spur us on to take action.