

# Guidance Notes for Faith Communities Considering Becoming Part of Eco Congregation Ireland (ECI)

## Background Information

Eco-Congregation Ireland (ECI) is a voluntary project encouraging churches of all denominations to incorporate sustainability and environmental awareness into worship, property and finance management, daily living, community outreach and contact with the developing world.

ECI was initiated in 2004 by the Church in Society Forum – a standing committee of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. The Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches are involved as well as the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Through their website, ECI provides resources, guidelines and examples for good environmental practice in four areas of church life: **Spiritual, Practical, Community and Global**. ECI is an All-Island organisation and the Committee consists of representatives from each of the main Christian churches. The representatives also liaise, in person, with churches who have registered with ECI and provide direct encouragement to them to make progress and to share their achievements with others.

To register as an Eco Congregation, a church completes an 'environmental check-up' to identify its existing good practice and to prioritise areas for development. ECI provides recognition for continuous commitment through four levels – Awareness Certificate, Endeavour Certificate, Award, and Gold Award. Progressing from one level to another involves setting up a team within the congregation, taking initiatives, monitoring outcomes and ultimately sharing achievements with the wider membership of ECI.

There are approximately 80 churches/faith communities who have received some level of Certificate or Award, and new applications begin each year. Projects undertaken by communities who receive certificates/awards vary according to factors such as location, resources available, local needs, traditions and expertise available. The projects can be as diverse as organising a 'repair café', harvesting surplus apples, education on the theology of creation care, prayer services, planting wildflower gardens, encouraging pollinators, cooperating with local environmental groups, sharing information on sustainability in everyday life, supporting projects in developing countries or contributing to public debate and campaigns for action on climate issues.

**To progress to the ECI Award, at least one project must be delivered in relation to each of the areas of Spiritual, Practical, Community and Global activity.**

Seeking accreditation as an Eco Congregation is not a 'green washing' exercise. ECI set challenging criteria and communities who embrace the challenges make significant contributions to the ECI network and its collective momentum. Rev Andrew Orr (ECI Chair) emphasises the importance of 'peer-to-peer learning and mutual support....an invaluable way to help catalyse communities into climate and environmental action'.

# Action Steps to Progressing from Registration to ECI Certificates and Awards

## 1. Set up a Sustainability Team

The term ‘Green Team’ is often used but ‘Sustainability’ incorporates broader concepts of long-term planning, intergeneration perspectives and global justice.

The first step for the Team Is to register with ECI following completion of the ‘Environmental Check Up for Your Church’ available at [www.ecocongregationireland.com](http://www.ecocongregationireland.com)

## 2. Receive the Awareness Certificate

A member of the ECI Committee gets in touch with the Contact Person named on the ‘Environmental Check Up’ form and, following that discussion, the Awareness Certificate is issued.

## 3. Develop an Action Planning, Monitoring and Review Process

Working in close cooperation with Church Leaders, the Sustainability Team develop Action Plans for a project in each of the areas that ECI regard as environmental good practice: Spiritual – Practical – Community – Global. The projects could incorporate work that is already on-going but has not been analysed or documented from an Eco Congregation perspective.

The Action Plan might look something like this, with records of progress updated electronically or in hard copy:

Area of Church Life	Goals	Resources needed	Action steps	Action by whom	Target date for start	Target date for completion	Progress Achieved	Date
<b>Spiritual</b>								
<b>Practical</b>								
<b>Community</b>								
<b>Global</b>								

## 4. Keep Records

Records might consist of folders (electronic or hard copy) containing orders of special prayers or services devoted to creation care, readings and reflections, PowerPoint presentations, notes of meetings and consultations, emails, photographs, sketches etc

After at least one year.....

## 5. Apply for the Endeavour Certificate

When at least one project has been completed in each of the four areas, an A4 summary of activities is submitted to ECI as an application for the Endeavour Certificate. This would normally be at least a year after registering with ECI.

After at least two years....

## 6. Apply for the Award

When significant progress has been made, an application for the Award is submitted in the form of a one-page summary of progress. This would normally be at least two years after registering with ECI. A visit by two assessors is then arranged. They view projects completed, meet some of those who have participated in the activities, and view the records.

Even further!!!

## 7. Apply for the Gold Award

To achieve the Gold Award, a congregation needs to show continued progress in each of the four areas of environmental good practice: Spiritual – Practical – Community – Global, **and to mentor another congregation on their journey to an Award.**