

## Creation-sensitive Development

### Presenter: Randy Van Dragt

The objective of the workshop was to illustrate, by example, how Christian environmental practitioners can help make stewardship principles real in developing master plans for institutions. The example used by Van Dragt was the development of a master plan for the Calvin College campus in Grand Rapids, completed in 1999. The campus involves about 150 ha of land, divided by a major 2-lane highway, that now hosts a human population of some 4200 people. It also includes wetlands and a large ecosystem preserve and functions as community 'greenspace' and as a wildlife corridor. The College has a history of high esteem for creation that includes the production of a book on *Earthkeeping* by its Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (first published in 1996 and later re-issued as *Earthkeeping in the Nineties*) and the establishment, in 1985, of the 40 ha Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve – a protected area of wetlands, forests and old agricultural fields.

Calvin College's Master Planning Advisory Committee was convened in 1997 to begin the task of planning for a major expansion of college facilities in a manner that both properly reflected the values and purposes of a Christian educational institution and found architectural expression in landscape as well as buildings. Van Dragt was a member of the Committee. His challenge, in this role, was to encourage other members to effectively include the natural environment within their concept of stewardship. He sought to do this by introducing appropriate values and principles into the discussion and articulating these in a manner relevant to the other objectives of the master plan. In doing so, he argued before the Committee that a nature preserve is more than just a collection of plants and animals, but that it has a functional relationship with its surrounding built environment. That, is, we must allow a place for the non-human aspects of creation within our land-use planning, not as an isolated corner or 'preserve' but as an integrated element within our community.

There were several factors that helped in achieving this integration of buildings and natural environment in this master planning process. First, the architect involved had a tradition of respect for existing landscape and had successfully integrated the built environment with the natural landscape in past projects. Secondly, the existing ecosystem preserve on the campus was an icon of Calvin College's environmental awareness. That is, it already had 'value' within the community. Third, the College invited Van Dragt, as a spokesperson for Calvin's ecological community, to be a member of the Committee. These factors all contributed to a final master plan that successfully proposed development that was 'creation sensitive'.

The subsequent discussion focused on the challenges of achieving such objectives in other communities where similar supportive factors are largely absent and which may thus be less receptive to integration of built and natural landscapes. It was noted by workshop participants that such seems to be the case for the Redeemer University College campus, where a similar creation-sensitivity in planning both past and future infrastructure expansions seems to be absent.

### Reporter: Henry Hengeveld