

Greening Houses of Worship

Nashville TIPL Chapter

The Nashville Chapter of Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light has put together this resource for houses of worship that wish to be more “green” as a response to their faith, but are not sure how to do it. It is our hope that these pages will grow as we share our experiences with one another and locate more partners that will help us care for our mutual home.

Energy

Almost the first thing folks think about in going “greener” is saving energy. Here are a few of our tips for saving energy in your house of worship. Most will apply to people’s homes, as well.

Energy Saving Lightbulbs

Compared to our traditional incandescent light bulbs, it makes a lot of sense to use energy-saving light bulbs. Although at first glance, it may seem that CFLs or LEDs are more expensive, they really save you money in the long run.

1. Energy Saving Lightbulbs use less energy. Can you say, “lower electrical bills”?
2. Energy Saving Lightbulbs last longer. That means less labor for replacing them, which is HUGE in a large sanctuary with high ceilings.
3. Energy Saving Lightbulbs burn cooler. So, your air conditioning won’t have to work as hard to keep the rooms cool in your place of worship.

Next time you have to buy light bulbs, invest in CFLs or LEDs and enjoy the energy savings.

Motion Detector Lights

Ever notice that when you use the rest room in your house of worship, the lights are always on? You may have only one men’s and one ladies’ room, but, if your congregation is large, you may have as many as three or more of each. That’s a lot of lights being left on all the time, and the rest room is not exactly where an eternal light should be situated! One of the easiest and least expensive things you can do to make your house of worship greener is to install motion detectors on your rest room lights, so that they go on when someone enters the rest room and go off when the person leaves.

The motion detectors that are used indoors are called “occupancy sensors.” The United States Department of Energy explains that they “detect indoor activity within a certain area...[and] provide convenience by turning lights on automatically when someone enters a room, and save

energy by turning lights off soon after the last occupant has left the room.” According to challengeforsustainability.org, estimates of energy savings may range from 35 to 75 percent.

Although you may choose to err on the side of caution and hire an electrician to install your occupancy sensors, if your maintenance person is skilled and willing, there is no reason he or she cannot do it. Infrared units, which detect both heat and motion (and therefore offer a more comprehensive response than those that detect only motion), start at about \$60 apiece as of this writing.

Mary Beth Stone, Congregation Ohabai Sholom

Programmable Thermostats

Save energy by making sure you are not heating or cooling your rooms when they are not occupied (which is probably most of the time). A programmable thermostat will turn the cooling or heat on a couple of hours before a gathering in your house of worship, and automatically turn it off once the room is empty.

Not only is it convenient, and saves a ton of money, it is also relatively easy to install on a small to medium system. Visit your local home improvement store for easily installed thermostats. You may also want to invest in covers for your thermostat to keep members from adjusting or deleting your program once it is set.

Comments? Additions? Corrections? Questions? Please email nashvillecreationcare@gmail.com

Environmental Education in a Congregation’s Religious School

Congregation Ohabai Sholom in Nashville works with organizations such as the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) to structure a curriculum for its religious school. The COEJL divides its resources into five programs, meant to spark, educate and mobilize communities toward environmental engagement.

1. Advocacy and Policy Issues
 - Themes include climate change, conservation, energy, environmental justice, and sustainability. Communities can consult the Jewish Energy Guide. One article is released each week; a typical article would address methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Jewish Thought and Texts
 - Collected from weekly Torah portions, one such text would be “The Great Flood and Noah.” Other texts to explore are Tu B’Shvat and Sukkot, holidays that celebrate botany and the harvest. Biodiversity and sustainable agriculture are natural topics for further exploration.

3. Jewish Life and Programs
 - Recommendations are to create a council of religious schoolers to come up with energy reduction initiatives, use the Cool Climate Small Business Carbon Footprint Calculator to measure baseline energy use, show religious schoolers how the synagogue recycling initiative functions.
4. Jewish Energy Covenant Campaign
 - One past initiative included participation with other congregations to achieve a 14% energy reduction by 2014. Congregants could sign the Jewish Energy Covenant Campaign Declaration, and clergy could contribute to the Rabbinical Assembly Statement on Energy Security that corresponded to the campaign.
5. Partner Organizations
 - Religious school and youth groups could partner with local conservation groups such as Audubon, Warner Parks, the Tennessee Native Plant Society, and the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association. Groups could volunteer at the Nashville Food Project and learn about area CSA's.

Drew Herzog, Congregation Ohabai Sholom

Food/Compost

Many houses of worship are known for food. Indeed, food is a wonderful community builder. Help to make your food-related gatherings more environmentally friendly with these ideas:

Composting at Your House of Worship

Many people think of stinky, vermin infested piles of slimy food when they think of composting. But it doesn't have to be that way. Learning to compost can help use food scraps that would otherwise contribute to a stinky garbage can and eventually the land fill. And, you wind up with wonderful soil for your gardens.

A simple compost bin can be constructed from wooden pallets, chicken wire, or even concrete blocks. Site your pile where it will be handy to the kitchen. The more convenient it is, the more it will be used.

If you have them, lay some sticks down for the bottom layer. This helps with air flow and helps the compost to turn to soil faster. Then, just throw food scraps onto the pile instead of in the trash can. Meat and dairy products do not compost well, although a few scraps will not ruin a good compost pile. Add grass clippings from your lawn, and trimmings from house plants or hedges. Adding plant matter helps with the odor of rotting food. If wildlife is a problem at your site, cover the pile with chicken wire.

In the fall, gather as many leaves as you can and run a lawn mower over them to chop them up. After Christmas, rent a chipper and chop up discarded Christmas trees.

While it is good to turn the pile occasionally, you can come up with quite adequate soil without turning – it just takes longer. But most of the time, if you fill the bin with leaves in the fall, it is ready for spring gardens. Invite your gardening friends to come and screen their own, putting any plant matter that has not turned to soil back into the pile.

Grounds

Make your landscaping environmentally friendly. Provide edible landscaping. Water responsibly. Limit the use of chemicals in your landscaping. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Earth Friendly Weed Control

If you have any landscaping around your house of worship, you have weed problems. And most landscapers of large properties use chemicals to control those weeds. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Use plain old vinegar instead of expensive chemicals. Fill a spray bottle with vinegar and spray away. Within 24 hours, the weeds will be withered and brown. However, this will not help weeds that are in a lawn. Vinegar will kill grass as easily as it kills weeds. The best thing for weed control in a lawn is to spread corn gluten on the grass in the fall and spring. This feeds the grass, making it strong enough to crowd out the weeds.

Another earth-friendly tool for weed control is a propane torch. Many garden centers will have one, or they are easily found on the web. Use a torch on those weeds, and you will have a weed-free parking lot in a matter of hours.

Build a Congregational Garden

Congregational gardens can be educational, beautiful, and provide benefits for many of your congregation members and beyond. Whether you grow for your own use, or share with the community, working on a community garden can be fun.

You might want to build raised beds in a sunny spot on your congregation's property. Congregation members that do not have appropriate sites at their home can use a bed to grow their own nutritious veggies. Or a gardening group can maintain the beds for use in your common kitchen.

You can also partner with local agencies that provide food for hungry people. In this case, you would want to till a sizable plot to grow lots of different kinds of tasty food. Often, the agency will provide volunteers to help maintain the garden.

You can also use edible plants as part of your landscaping. A hedge of blueberries looks attractive, and provides food for wildlife as well as your congregation.

Purchasing in a Congregation's Facility Management

The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) recommends addressing purchasing in five groups:

1. Paper

- Buy copy paper, paper towels, tissues, and toilet paper with at least 50% post-consumer recycled content.
- Buy recycled paper processed without the use of chlorine (Neenah Paper, Conservatree).

2. Lightbulbs

- Switching from incandescent to compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) reduces electricity usage by 75%.
- Buy bulbs with T-8 ballasts instead of the older T-12s.
- CFLs last up to 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, but produce less heat and require less maintenance.

3. Cleaning Supplies

- Consult care2.com for product reviews and recommendations.

4. Coffee

- Fair Trade: pickers received a fair wage for their work.
- Shade grown: beans grew on indigenous plants beneath the intact canopy of the native rainforest.
- Organic.
- Consult TransfairUSA.org for certified fair trade producers.

5. Kitchen

- Consult Energy Guide stickers on appliances. These show the range of energy consumption for similar products in kWh.
- Consult US EPA Energy Star program for recommended products.

- Buy re-usable plates.

Drew Herzog, Congregation Ohabai Sholom

Start a Recycling Program

One of the easiest environmentally friendly activities a congregation can manage is a recycling program. Most houses of worship use a lot of paper, and wherever food is prepared or served often creates a lot of recyclable material. Here are some tips for reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Provide recycling bins in any area that uses paper, such as religious education rooms, office areas, and kitchen areas. Solicit volunteers from the congregation to sort the items and take them to a recycling area.

Unsubscribe your congregation from Direct Mailing Services.

When copying, use both sides of the paper.

Provide a bin for paper that is only printed on one side and let the children of the congregation use it for coloring or crafts.

When serving food, provide a bin for food scraps that can be composted. Most meat does not compost well, but vegetables, breads, and plant matter is a welcome addition to any compost bin. Ask a gardener to take the bin home for a personal compost bin. Or, ask a member who keeps chickens to take the scraps home to enrich the chicken's diet.

A valuable addition to any compost bin or flower bed is coffee grounds. Keep a bin next to the coffee maker and present the full bin to any gardener.

For a fundraiser, collect aluminum drink cans and sell them to an aluminum recycler. They will often give more money to a house of worship than they will an individual.

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Water

Many houses of worship have programs to help persons in third-world countries get the potable water they need for survival. Yet, our buildings contain lots of water-wasting. Crack down on the waste of water and decrease your water usage with these ideas.

Water Maintenance

The easiest way to save money on your water bill is to simply keep up the maintenance on your plumbing. Follow these tips to make sure your congregation is not using more water than it needs to.

1. At least once a month, do a walk-through of all bathrooms and kitchens. Check all sinks for drippy faucets, and toilets for leaks. Inspect the area underneath any sink to make sure there is no dampness caused by a leak.
2. If your congregation uses a watering system on its landscape, make sure you inspect the watering on a regular basis. Sprinkler heads can get hit by lawn mowers and begin watering the sidewalk instead of the grass. Leaks can spring up in pipes. Also, pay attention to the weather when using an automatic sprinkler system. If it rains more than an inch during the week, you may turn the sprinkler system off. Nothing is more wasteful than a sprinkler going full blast in the middle of a downpour.
3. Check outside faucets for drips or leaks, especially in areas that do not receive a great deal of traffic, where a dripping faucet could go undetected for weeks.

Reduce the Use of Water Bottles

Last year, the average American used 167 disposable water bottles, and only recycled 38 (1). Help members of your congregation reduce the use of these bottles by providing drinking fountains – particularly drinking fountains that have the capacity to refill more permanent water bottles, or cups.

If possible, avoid purchasing these disposable water bottles, and opt for large thermoses for your congregational gatherings. Or, serve water in washable pitchers with washable cups provided.

Dual Flush Toilets

One way to save water in your facility is to replace your older toilets with Dual Flush Toilets, available widely wherever plumbing supplies are sold.

The dual flush toilet has two buttons, or mechanisms to control the amount of water used to empty the toilet. One button is used for liquid waste, and the other button for solid waste. The solid waste button uses about twice the water of the liquid waste one.

Some toilets feature a difference in the flush lever itself. You pull up on the lever to flush liquid waste and down for solid.

While dual flush toilets cost considerably more than traditional flush toilets, the savings in water usage will prove the additional cost worth it.

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