

Eagle Tribune

Go green! Religious groups focus on the environment

Churches, synagogues focus on the environment

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By Yadira Betances

In the beginning, newspapers, catalogs and reams of paper, along with numerous bottles and cans, were thrown away in the regular trash at area churches and synagogues.

Not anymore.

As society has become more conscious about the environment, so have local houses of worship.

"We're very conscious of the whole green concept and try to maintain it," said Carrie Lavoie, administrative assistant at Temple Emanuel in Andover.

The synagogue recycles all types of paper from its office, nursery and religious schools.

"First and foremost, we are a religious place, but we are also a community and as a community, we have to be conscious of what's happening around us and be role models for others," Lavoie said.

The temple has been recycling for the past three years, but members had to take the items home. Now, there is a recycling bin on the premises.

At First Church Congregational in Methuen, it was teenagers who came up with the idea of recycling.

"The youth are learning about the environment in school and are very aware of what's happening with it," said the Rev. Linda Kreil, the church's pastor. "It's really their future we're looking at. Churches can serve as a model for good behavior, and being good to the environment is one of them."

A recycling dumpster was placed next to the garbage dumpster in the parking lot of the rear of the church.

"The idea is that we all need to be good stewards of God's creation," Kreil said. "In a way, it was a no brainer."

United Church of Christ congregations such as First Church have set a precedent in being watchdogs for the environment. Churches have had tree plantings, events centered around Earth Day and services built around creation.

In Andover, South Church and West Parish, both United Church of Christ congregations, are doing their part.

During Lent, members of South Church have been using a booklet titled, "Our Earth: God's Sacred Space" for personal reflection. Every Lent, members are asked to write poetry, essays, songs or favorite scripture passages with a different theme. This year's committee decided to use the Earth as a theme.

Throughout the year, South Church members bring in returnable glass, metal and plastic bottles, which are recycled by Pack 73 Boy Scouts.

South Church's pastor, the Rev. John Zehring, has preached about taking care of the Earth from the pulpit, and the church even has a Green Team committee which educates members about environmental issues.

South Church is also hosting a number of events honoring Earth Week, from April 25 to May 2.

"We have to be more conscious of preserving God's creation," said Bill Schroder, a member of South Church. "We see it as a spiritual thing, as well as good citizenship."

At West Parish, members voted last year to include a Green Covenant as part of the church's mission statement.

The covenant reads, "We, the members of West Parish Church of Andover, accept our responsibility to be stewards of the Earth and the People who live on the Earth, and we pledge ourselves to act accordingly to help preserve God's creation."

First Baptist Church in Haverhill has also gone green, and not just with the coat of green paint on the trim in the Christian education building.

There are paper recycling baskets in the offices, a recycling bin for bottles and cans in the main hallway, and a recycling dumpster in front of the church on Main Street.

Free Christian Church on Elm Street in Andover has been recycling for the past 10 years, said the Rev. Jack Daniel, pastor.

The church also changed all its light bulbs to energy efficient ones, started recycling print cartridges, and stopped using Styrofoam containers.

The Rev. Stephanie Chase Wilson, pastor of St. Paul Episcopal Church in North Andover, wrote about "Environmentalism and Global Warming are Christian Concerns" in the parish newsletter.

She said taking care of the environment is nothing new for people of faith. Prayers for the Earth can be found in the Book of Common Prayer used by Episcopalians, writings by theologians over the centuries, and even books in the Bible.

"It goes back to the fact that we need to care for God's creation, and this is a good way to begin," Kreil said. "If we believe in God, and creation was given to our care, then we need to take that seriously."