

FAITH

Protecting the environment part of outreach



Jim Weber/The Commercial Appeal

Allison Delugach, left, and Linda Kaplan, members of Temple Israel's Eco Taskforce, utilize examples of recycled products (top) through their educational outreach program called EDEN.

GOD'S WORK

By SUZANNE THOMPSON
Special to Going Green

To members of Temple Israel, protecting the environment is not just socially correct. It's a commandment from God.

"We are commanded to guard and keep the earth. God gives us the opportunity to be here," said Rabbi Adam Grossman.

To that end, Temple Israel has done a

Buttons are set out on a table to encourage recycling during the third annual Eco Expo at Temple Israel in January.

Mike Brown
The Commercial
Appeal



number of things through the years not only to raise awareness about ecological issues, but to encourage the congregation to take action.

While some members of the temple were already recycling at home, it was in 2006 during a High Holiday sermon given by Rabbi Tara Feldman that the congregation was charged as a whole with becoming more environmentally friendly.

In her sermon, "Fill the Earth and Master It," Feldman spoke of global warming and the ever-growing beast of American consumption, and encouraged the congregation to take baby steps to begin changing their behavior.

She told them about the small compost pile she began behind the temple building.

"This compost pile is going to change the world. It's a tiny, rather messy gesture on my part and I look pretty ridiculous in my high heels, bucket of slop in hand, making my way across the

grass and mud to the compost pile. I laugh at myself... but this small daily ritual pushes away my despair. It gives me a sense of hope. I can do something."

Did the compost pile change the world?

It definitely changed the world at Temple Israel and planted a seed that got everyone thinking about the environment, said Linda Kaplan, who heads up the Temple Israel Environmental Task Force.

Raising awareness was the first step in bringing about change, Kaplan said.

Rabbi Feldman's sermon led to a regular article in the temple's monthly bulletin, which offered quiz questions about the environment, like "What wood is the most eco-friendly, fastest renewable wood flooring to have installed?"

The congregation heard the message, which spread to "The Hebrew Watchman," a publication serving the entire Jewish community in Memphis, and the quiz question transformed into a semi-monthly advice column called "Ask

Adam and Eve.”

One young girl wrote in that her mother didn't want to recycle paper because she said it made too much of a mess.

The answer given was that if she was old enough to recognize this problem she was old enough to do something about it, followed by practical solutions to begin a tidy paper recycling area.

“The bigger issue encompasses the question, are we conscious of our impact on the world? Are we conscious that each and every thing we do affects the world we live in, including the earth?” Grossman said.

The advice column ran for about a year, and then officials at the temple began to focus attention back to the temple itself.

The eco-efforts of Temple Israel began formally with the formation of the EDEN committee.

“I always thought of it as trying to bring the earth back to the purity of the Garden of Eden,” Kaplan said.

The temple began a paper and recycling program for everything generated there.

Then an environmental education display was assembled, which encouraged recycling efforts by displaying different types of recycled materials and showed eco-trivia, such as “How many trees are used each year producing toilet paper?”

When Billy Orgel was installed as president of Temple Israel in May 2008, his remarks made it clear that he wanted the congregation to become involved in conservation efforts.

“I feel that Temple as part of a larger community needs to do all that we can

do to preserve our resources and the environment — whether that be recycling here at Temple or just conserving electricity by turning off lights and using energy-saving bulbs. We currently have a highly energized environmental committee that I would like to see continue their innovation in a positive way.”

During his two-year term as president, Orgel did see the program progress.

In 2009, the temple began a Sunday morning speaker series, during which environmental leaders in the community talked to the adult Sunday school group.

Judge Larry Potter, who presides over the city's Environmental Court, spoke to them one Sunday.

“They were a great group, and clearly committed to having a positive impact on the environment,” he said.

Potter's talk also brought new awareness to people at the temple.

“Nobody knew there was an environmental court before he spoke,” Kaplan said.

Temple Israel started an expo of its own, the Eco Expo.

Held in January, this was the third year the temple has put on the expo which is open to the public, and officials plan to continue with the annual event.

“The Eco Expo has really reshaped the culture of understanding for environmental issues,” Grossman said.

The charge to change behavior which will affect the environment is not limited to any particular faith, Grossman said.

“It's the ability that we have as Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, or whoever, to really make an impact in our world by making simple changes in our current regimen,” he said.