



Mount Zion Temple
Congregational Position Statement
Repairing our World - Protect the Planet

*Approved unanimously by the Board of Directors
May 6, 2025 / 9 Iyar 5785 / Day 24 of the Omer*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית

Source of blessing, Eternal our God, Your majestic power makes all creation.

WHEREAS *our planet suffers the interconnected crises of rapid climate change and unprecedented species loss, we know that this loss is caused by human actions such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, pollution, and overfishing, and the results are tangible. For instance, the Earth's temperature has risen by 1.2°C (2.2°F) above pre-industrial levels, intensifying extreme weather, sea level rise, and ecosystem disruptions.¹ Our local growing zones are shifting.² Minnesota mega-rains are more likely than in the past, causing widespread flooding.³ Winter temperatures are rising, with negative consequences for fish populations, lake water quality, and recreation.⁴ And as environmental justice advocates have shown, the most vulnerable people are hit first and hardest.⁵*

We are keenly aware our actions affect our world and some people more than others. We believe we can disrupt the ecocide.⁶

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: Compelled by our Jewish values, our history, the urgency of the climate crisis, and our 2023 Strategic Plan,⁷ Mount Zion Temple resolves to confront the climate crisis and do the following:

1. Cultivate resilient spirits as we respond to the climate crisis.
2. Establish sustainability practices for our building, grounds, and programs.
3. Educate and advocate.

A new committee of the Board, “Protecting the Planet / *Bal Tashchit* Committee,” will oversee the implementation of these commitments over the years of our Strategic Plan and beyond as guided by this congregational position statement. The President will appoint Board members and congregants with expertise and passion to this committee.

We are called to action by our shared Jewish values.

We people are called in Hebrew *adam*, created from the *adamah*, soil. We are spiritually “of the earth.” We have a sacred responsibility to our planet. *Kohelet Rabbah*, an ancient midrash on Ecclesiastes written long before humanity had the ability to truly destroy the planet, reminds us that our Jewish responsibility to protect the earth began with the very first human:

When the Holy Blessed One created the first [person]...God said: “See My creations, how beautiful and exemplary they are. Everything I created, I created for you. Make certain that you do not ruin and destroy My world, as if you destroy it, there will be no one to mend it after you.” (*Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13)

We are called to the work of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, with both clarity and urgency, that is based in our values and not in partisan politics. *Tikkun olam* is repair that is significant and sustainable for the sake of our future. A well-known and oft-repeated story comes from the Talmud: “One day as Honi was walking along, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him “how many years will it take until it will bear fruit?” The man replied, “not for seventy years.” Honi asked him, “do you really believe you’ll live another seventy years?” The man answered, “I found this world provided with carob trees, and as my ancestors planted them for me, so I too plant them for my descendants.” (*Taanit* 23a:15) Our efforts are for today and the benefit *l’dor va’dor*, of future generations.

Mount Zion’s Commitments

This congregational position statement is both a statement of intent and an action plan building upon previous work. Where a plan has yet to be fully developed, we make our intentions clear. Where the congregation has developed a plan, specific actions are noted.

I. Cultivate resilient spirits as we respond to the climate crisis.

This work is hard and many have been at this for a long time. To keep our spirits resilient, we must cultivate the character traits of *netzach* (endurance) and *ometz lev* (courageous heart) and realize that just as previous generations planted trees for us, we can symbolically (and literally)

do that for future generations. As the oldest synagogue in the Upper Midwest, located on Summit Avenue, and with over 700 households and an inspiring clergy, staff, and lay leadership, we are well-positioned to respond. Examples of how we will nurture our *netzach* and *ometz lev* include:

- Approach the climate crisis with a Jewish perspective drawing on the Torah's story of creation and the Jewish calendar of holidays and commemorations to more fully realize our obligation, as stated in our *Derech*, "to be guardians of the Earth."
- Encourage time in nature for all generations to experience what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel calls our "radical amazement," the ability to feel awe before the mystery of creation.
- We will provide resources and support for personal and home-based sustainability efforts so that congregants can feel the satisfaction of being "part of the solution" while building courage to acknowledge how much more there is to do.
- Recognize we are in this together as we join in study, prayer, and action.

2. Establish sustainability practices for our building, grounds, and programs.

We commit to the mitzvah of *בַּל תַּשְׁחִית* *bal tashchit* – do not destroy – which prohibits any wasteful or negative effect on the natural environment. Our property will become a green space beneficial to the plants, pollinators, and people for our congregation and surrounding neighborhood. We will reduce the environmental impact in Mount Zion's programming. For example, we will:

- Continue the ongoing commitment to making our building more energy efficient. All renovations and upgrades to the building will consider energy efficiency and sustainability as important criteria.
- We will develop and enact a sustainability plan for the grounds. We will draw on the expertise and commitment within Mount Zion.
- Inspire awareness of issues and actions such as fossil fuel consumption and its reduction. For example, a partial list includes exploring the following:
 - EV-charging stations in one of the parking lots.
 - Adequate bicycle racks and storage with outlets for eBikes.
 - Alternate forms of transportation to and from the synagogue knowing 50% of congregants live within six miles of Mount Zion.

- Carpooling opportunities to and from the synagogue and off-site events in areas where congregants are densely gathered.
- Xcel Energy's Renewable Connect or similar programs.
- Solar panels on the grounds or building.
- Arrange hands-on, intergenerational actions such as planting trees. This simple act serves many purposes, including the absorption of carbon dioxide, the reduction of temperature from shade, and the provision of habitat for diversity of life, while providing beauty.
- Enable Mount Zion staff and lay leaders who create programming to limit the carbon footprint of that programming based on guidelines developed by the Protecting the Planet / *Bal Tashchit* Committee.

3. Educate and Advocate.

We commit to doing our part towards mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss by offering educational programs focusing on the intersection of Jewish values and environmental action **to embolden Mount Zion to advocate in the public square.** For example:

- Organize workshops and class series on Jewish values and sustainable living, climate change science, biodiversity conservation, as well as legislative and legal processes, tailored to different age groups and expertise levels.
- Bring in, as we consider advocacy, “speakers from different perspectives,” as stated in our Strategic Plan, “who can address these topics and support communication practices to have respectful conversations in line with our *Derech* (path)” including inviting speakers from communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- Train congregants to become community leaders in environmental action, from organizing local clean-ups such as *Reverse Tashlich* to advocating for policies that protect the environment.
- Allow Mount Zion leadership to sign onto efforts to mitigate environmental degradation and invite congregation engagement.

Criteria for Congregational Advocacy

We commit to a central Jewish value stated on the sign in front of Mount Zion: “*Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof* / Justice, justice you shall pursue” (Deut. 16:20). To “pursue justice” requires action. With the passage of this resolution, the Protecting the Planet/ *Bal Tashchit* Committee, in consultation with the President and Senior Rabbi, will determine when to add Mount Zion's name for support of local, national, or international advocacy efforts. These questions will be guidelines as criteria for engagement:

1. Is our choice to engage grounded in our Jewish values as articulated in our *Derech*?
2. Have our partners requested our support?
3. Are we listening to the people most impacted by climate change on these matters?
4. How significant an impact will this advocacy make?
5. Will our engagement as a synagogue on this advocacy make a difference?
6. Have congregants expressed support, interest, or curiosity about this issue?
7. Have we educated the congregation about this advocacy, including hearing different views on policy?
8. Do we have the time and resources to commit to this action?

External Partners

Mount Zion will build strategic partnerships as stated in our Strategic Plan and may pursue partnership with local Houses of Worship (such as area synagogues and Gloria Dei Lutheran Church), local advocacy groups (such as [Rise and Repair](#) and [Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light](#)), national advocacy groups (such as [Dayenu](#) and [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)), and Middle East advocacy groups (such as the [Arava Institute for Environmental Studies](#) and [EcoPeace](#)).

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְכִּין מַצְעָדֵי גִבּוֹר.

Blessed is the Eternal our God Who makes firm our steps.

Endnotes

¹ Lindsey, Rebecca and Luann Dahlman. "Climate Change: Global Temperature." *climate.gov: Science Information for a Climate-Smart Nation*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 18 January 2024. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature>. Accessed 28 April 2024.

² "A new plant hardiness zone map from the USDA." *University of Minnesota Extension*. 20 November 2023. <https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-news/new-plant-hardiness-zone-map-usda>. Accessed 28 April 2025.

³ "Mega-rains overwhelm rivers, roads, and budgets." *Our Minnesota Climate*. <https://climate.state.mn.us/mega-rains-overwhelm-rivers-roads-and-budgets>. Accessed 28 April 2025.

⁴ "As winters in Minnesota get warmer, the lake ice season is shrinking." Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. 11 March 2025. <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/as-winters-in-minnesota-get-warmer-the-lake-ice-season-is-shrinking>. Accessed 28 April 2025.

⁵ For example, the Highway 94 expansion displaced Rondo's Black community, causing economic harm, pollution, and cultural loss, disproportionately burdening a marginalized group and highlighting systemic inequities. This happened within a mile of Mount Zion Temple's Summit Avenue address.

⁶ The significance of this devastation is invoked in the term *ecocide*, on which Mount Zion guest speaker Ellen Kennedy provides background: "The root *eco* comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning home. And *cide*, from *cidere*, means to kill. More than 50 years ago, Professor Arthur Galston, a biologist at Yale University, used this word, *ecocide*, to describe environmental damage caused when the U.S. sprayed more than 20 million tons of the deadly toxin Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. Agent Orange defoliated jungles in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos and caused cancers, neurological disease, and birth defects in at least 3 million people. Ecocide means killing one's home — and that's what we're doing. We see it every day: droughts, floods, fires, hurricanes, melting icecaps, rising seas, dead coral reefs, and extinct animals and botanical species. We are killing our home." Kennedy, Ellen. "Ecocide." 25 October 2025. Mount Zion Temple. D'var Torah.

⁷ Mount Zion's *Derech* (Path) adopted in 2023 commits Mount Zion to do the following as part of our vision of *Tzedek* (Justice):

- Engage congregants with diverse experiences and perspectives to learn from Jewish texts and from each other and honor disagreements as is our tradition. This will prepare us to partner with others to take action in the work of *tikkun olam* (healing and repair of the world).
- Be guardians of the Earth, pursue equity, and counter oppression in its many forms.

The fourth strategy of the Strategic Plan – Repair of the Planet – continues:

Today, we are faced with two great challenges: the climate crisis and rising "othering" and hate in our society. We want to amplify what we are already doing, and will continue to do, as our core work of *tzedek*. Then we will create Congregational Position Statements so that we can develop bolder initiatives and build stronger strategic partnerships. (See the fully developed strategy including how we might attain this strategy [by following this link](#).)