



DRAFT

Mount Zion Temple - Spring 2025 Congregational Position Statement: Repair of the Planet

BE IT RESOLVED: Compelled by our Jewish values, our history, the urgency of the climate crisis, and our 2023 Strategic Plan,¹ Mount Zion resolves to confront the climate crisis and do the following:

1. Cultivate resilient spirits.
2. Establish sustainability practices for our building, grounds, and congregational 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 through 2028. 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.

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.”²

If we pause to appreciate our natural world, we are confronted with the eternal beauty of creation and the current, precarious state into which we humans have placed it.

We are called to the work of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, with both clarity and alacrity, that is based in our values and not in partisan politics. We need to begin to repair the world

while understanding the impacts of our choices. We do this now and for the future. We are inspired by a story from the same *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* as above: When an old man was asked why he was planting a fig tree from which he may not eat its fruit, the old man replied, “If I merit it, I will eat [of them]; if not, then just as my ancestors labored for me, so I am laboring for my progeny.”³ We act not only for our benefit, but also the benefit of future generations.

Mount Zion’s Commitments

This congregation position statement straddles the space between an action plan and a statement of intent. Where the congregation has developed a plan, specific actions are noted. Where a plan has yet to be developed, we make our intentions clear.

I. Cultivate resilient spirits

~~We will nurture spiritual resilience to confront the climate crisis. This effort will be long and grueling, and despair and burnout are possibilities.~~ We will need to nurture *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. Because of inspiring clergy, staff, and lay leaders, we are well-positioned to respond. Examples of how we will cultivate resilient spirits include:

- Approach the climate crisis with a Jewish perspective, with the guidance of clergy, staff, and lay leadership, drawing on our mythical story of creation and the Jewish calendar of holidays and commemorations.
- Provide resources and support for home-based and personal sustainability efforts, for example composting and energy conservation, knowing that acting to protect the planet in ways large and small will strengthen our spirits.
- Encourage time in nature to experience the radical amazement of creation (Abraham Joshua Heschel).

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

We commit to the mitzvah of *בִּלְתִּישְׁחִית* *bal taschit*, do not destroy. *Bal tashchit* prohibits any wasteful negative effect on the natural environment. We will use our property to create a green

space beneficial to our surrounding environment, while being intentional to mitigate the environmental impact of Mount Zion's programming. For example, we will:

- Continue the ongoing commitment to making the 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.
- Encourage awareness of issues and actions such as fossil fuel consumption and its reduction, including
 - studying the feasibility of providing EV-charging stations in one of the parking lots;
 - providing adequate and secure bicycle racks and storage; providing charging stations for electric bicycles;
 - educating and promoting alternate forms of transportation to and from the synagogue;
 - facilitating carpooling opportunities to and from the synagogue in areas where congregants are densely gathered;
 - promoting carpooling to off-site events.
 - enrolling in Excel Energy's Renewable Connect.
 - exploring the feasibility of solar panels on the grounds or building
- Have hands-on, intergenerational actions such as planting trees.
- Train, educate, and empower 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 and will:

- Organize workshops on sustainable living, climate change science, biodiversity conservation, as well as legislative and legal processes, tailored to different age groups and expertise levels.

- Collaborate with subject matter experts (both inside and outside of Mount Zion) such as soil conservation experts, urban botanists, sustainable architectural experts, lawyers, lobbyists, scientists or environmental justice advocates and others to enrich our programming.
- Bring in, as stated in our Strategic Plan: “speakers from different perspectives who can address these topics and support communication practices to have respectful conversations in line with our *derech* (path).”
- Prioritize invited speakers from communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.
- Train congregants to become community leaders in environmental action, from organizing local clean-ups to advocating for policies that protect the environment.
- Allow Mount Zion leadership to sign onto efforts to mitigate environmental degradation. (See “Criteria for Taking Action” below.)

Criteria for Taking Action

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 efforts. These questions will be guidelines as criteria for engagement:

1. Is our advocacy grounded in our Jewish values as articulated in our *Derech*?
2. Have our partners requested our support?
3. How significant an impact will this advocacy make?
4. Will our engagement as a synagogue on this advocacy make a difference?
5. Have we done education with the congregation about this advocacy, including hearing different views on policy?
6. Do we have the time and resources to commit to this action?

External Partners

We are blessed to have many organizations both locally, nationally, and internationally in Israel that are committed to climate justice. As a starting point for Mount Zion's climate action, we will pursue partnership with the following and other similar organizations:

- [Jewish Community Action](#)
- [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)
- [Adamah](#)
- [Dayenu](#)
- [Jewish Climate Action Network](#)
- [Arava Institute for Environmental Studies](#)
- [Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light](#)
- [100% Minnesota](#)
- [Rise and Repair](#)
- [EcoPeace](#)

As our congregational journey continues, our partnerships may change depending both on context and opportunity.

Why Us? Why Now?

Our Mount Zion congregation is privileged to be located in one of the richest and most climate-resilient habitats in North America: *Mni Sota Makoce*, "land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds," as Gwen Westerman, Native American educator and Minnesota Poet Laureate, translates.⁴ We are home to one of the world's great rivers and largest freshwater lake. Our abundant freshwater gives life, just as it provides a frontline defense against drought. Our beauty is in our people—as diverse as our grasses and Northwoods—and our call to be caretakers of the world gives us a powerful opportunity to be on the frontlines of environmental stewardship.

Yet, our planet suffers the interconnected crises of rapid climate change and unprecedented species loss. This is caused by human actions like burning fossil fuels, deforestation, pollution, and overfishing. 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.⁵ Over 1 million species are at risk of extinction, threatening our air, water and food.⁶ The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates nearly 25 million acres of forests are lost annually—roughly the

equivalent size of Iceland, worsening both biodiversity loss and climate change by displacing wildlife, releasing carbon and reducing carbon sequestration, further escalating the crisis.⁷ And as environmental justice advocates have shown, the most vulnerable people are hit first and hardest.⁸

In a word, we are killing our home.⁹

Home is not just our blue-green planet, but our hearth and loved ones. And some homes are closer to the path of destruction than others.

Climate Justice recognizes that the climate crisis is discriminatorily destroying homes. It is bound up with issues like violence against Indigenous lands and sacred traditions, immigrant rights, labor abuses, unfair housing, and racial injustice. Workers in noxious environments face elevated health risks. Indigenous communities suffer from harmful industrial practices. Climate change disproportionately impacts low-income and BIPOC communities, worsened by environmental racism. Toxic industries often target these areas, leading to poorer health, shorter lifespans, substandard housing, and limited economic opportunities—an overall assault on families' and people's quality of life. Climate Justice helps us understand the environmental crisis as a political, economic, and racial issue as much as it is ecological.¹⁰

We face nature deprivation in our own backyards. Minnesota has lost thousands of acres of forested wetlands, the frontline defense against water pollution.¹¹ Our city was once entirely oak savannah, now a rare landscape type marked by native prairie grasslands and clumps of tree cover. Our state contains some of the last remaining native grasslands—one of the most critical ecosystems for trapping carbon and a haven for iconic songbirds. Yet only a little over 1 percent of it remains.¹² We've lost over half the population of grassland birds.¹³ Protecting watersheds and grasslands is one of the direst challenges facing Heartland folks.

Yet, we still have reason to hope. The worst consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss are not inevitable. However, the window for avoiding catastrophic impacts is closing. Without transformative changes in the way we extract resources and use the land, climate and species impacts will become harder and more expensive to prevent.

World leaders have called for a global commitment to curb rising temperatures to avoid the worst effects of climate change, aiming for net zero economy-wide emissions by 2050, and to protect 30 percent of land and water from development by 2030. What can we do as a Mount

Zion community—as Jewish “guardians of the Earth”—to answer the call?¹⁴ We have an urgent need to address these existential threats *now*. What we do today matters.

Endnotes

¹ 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](#).)

² Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

³ Kohelet Rabbah 2:20

⁴ Westerman, Gwen and Bruce White. *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2019, 13.

⁵ United Nations. *Key Findings on Climate Change Science*. United Nations, Accessed 6 Jan 2024, www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings.

⁶ United Nations. "UN Report: Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’." *United Nations*, 6 May 2019, www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/.

⁷ Ritchie, Hannah. "Deforestation and Forest Loss." *Our World in Data*, November 2024, ourworldindata.org/deforestation. Sourced from: UN FAO. *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020*—Key findings. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8753en>

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

- ¹⁰ Sopariwala, Afrin. *Climate Justice Narrative*. Communications Hub, Aug. 2016, [climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/Climate%20Justice%20Narrative_Communications%20Hub%20\(1\).pdf](https://climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/Climate%20Justice%20Narrative_Communications%20Hub%20(1).pdf)
- ¹¹ Stanley, Greg.. "Minnesota is rapidly losing valuable wetlands." *Star Tribune*, 28 Aug. 2024, <https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-us-are-losing-valuable-wetlands-at-increasing-rate/601132544>
- ¹² The Nature Conservancy. "Glacial Ridge Project." *The Nature Conservancy*, 2025, www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/glacial-ridge-project/.
- ¹³ Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Bring Birds Back." *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*, 2025, www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/.
- ¹⁴ We affirm in our 2040 Derech (Path), approved by the Board on June 13, 2023, that our commitment to Tzedek (Justice) calls us to "be guardians of the Earth, pursue equity, and counter oppression in its many forms." (See <http://mzion.org/about/vision/>.)