



by Mike Sawchuck

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Putting political differences aside, religious scholars have long noted that Jews and Muslims have more in common than many people realize. They both are descendants of Abraham; each group requires that circumcisions be performed; Jerusalem is sacred to both Muslims and Jews; and similar traditions, practices and customs are evident in both groups.

And it appears a new similarity may now be evolving as well. Some mosques and synagogues are embracing Green and becoming much more environmentally conscious—and more are expected to follow suit. Both religious groups say these steps are being taken not necessarily because the world is becoming much more environmentally conscious but because of scripture found in both the Koran and the Old Testament.

For instance, Islam urges its followers to “show reverence for all that Allah created,” such as our planet. Jewish texts advocate being environmentally responsible, stemming from the principle bal tashchit, which cautions against being wasteful or destructive.

Two such examples of these groups going Green are an existing mosque and community center in London and a relatively new synagogue in Evanston, Ill., built not only with Green in mind but with the hope of being LEED certified as well.

Offsetting carbon emissions in a London mosque, the South Woodford Muslim Community Centre in London is headed by Dr. Mohammed Fahim, who is evolving into one of Islam's Green pioneers. "We want our people to start thinking about being carbon-free, recycling more and becoming less wasteful," he says.

To help in this effort, Fahim has initiated a number of projects to reduce the energy consumption of the facility, such as switching to energy-conserving lighting and reducing heating and air-conditioning needs. He has also taken steps for the facility to save water. "One of the things Muslims do is use a lot of water," he says. "We must wash before we pray, and we must shower after certain things, but even if the water comes from a rushing stream it is important to not be wasteful."

Congregants are also encouraged to walk or ride their bikes to the Centre, instead of drive, and to take steps to make their own lives Greener and more sustainable as well. However, because of cost issues and the fact that the mosque is housed in a relatively old building, Fahim is limited in what he can do to make the facility Greener and more sustainable. In light of this, his congregants have started a unique program in which they are planting trees in the Amazon Rainforest to offset the carbon emissions produced by their facility.

Rebuilding, Recycling and Reusing in Evanston

About 10 years ago, leaders of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, Ill., just north of Chicago, realized their synagogue was in need of such significant repair—costing more than \$1.5 million—that it might be wiser, and less expensive in the long run, to just tear down the old structure and build a new one. In October 2006, ground broke on the new facility, with plans not only to make it larger to fit the growing congregation but to make it the first LEED-certified synagogue in the United States.

Following are some of the environmentally focused steps the facility took:

- Reclaimed, recycled and reused wood from barns being torn down in upstate New York
- Used Low-E (Low-emissivity) glass to help keep heat inside the building in winter and reduce heat flow into the building in summer
- Installed energy-conserving lighting and mechanicals throughout the building
- Installed low-flow restroom fixtures with time limits and dual-flush toilets,* which use considerably less water than conventional toilets
- Pledged to use only environmentally preferable cleaning supplies and products for the cleaning of the structure

The building opened in February 2008. A few months later it was awarded Platinum LEED certification—the highest of four levels of LEED certification—from the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, D.C.

Steps to Greening a Religious Facility

Although both of these facilities have taken different paths, each has the goal of becoming Greener and more environmentally responsible. In many ways, it was easier to Green the Evanston synagogue because it had the funds to build an entirely new structure designed to be Green. However, that does not mean an existing structure cannot take significant steps to become more environmentally responsible.

Some of the steps any facility can take to become more Green include:

- **Conduct an audit:** find out such things as how much energy and water the facility is using; what kind of cleaning chemicals and other products are being used to maintain the facility; and where repairs are needed that can help reduce the facility's overall impact on the environment.
- **Build a team:** in both the mosque and synagogue mentioned, a "Green Team" was established to generate support and provide leadership for the Greening process.
- **Develop a plan:** based on the audit and with the Green Team in place, determine the most effective, necessary and cost-effective steps that can be taken to make the facility Greener.
- **Become Green-focused:** Implement the plan. Green has a beginning but not an end. It should be viewed as a journey. Facilities should always be looking for new ways to become more environmentally friendly and responsible.

Making Green Easy

The planning step when going Green is very important. Some things, such as installing new, more energy efficient heating and air conditioning systems may be too expensive to tackle right now. Insulating roofing, which may require the installation of an entirely new roof, can also be a very big expenditure.

The best way to become Greener is to separate items by which steps can be taken now, are cost neutral or cost very little, and can be incorporated quickly. Separate these from items that are more costly but still not major and can be incorporated within 12 months. And finally, the largest and most costly projects that can be scheduled within five years or less.

For instance, one of the easiest and fastest steps churches can take to make facilities Greener, more environmentally responsible and healthier with little or no added cost or organizational changes, is to begin using certified and proven Green cleaning products. This means the product has been independently analyzed by organizations such as GreenSeal, EcoLogo or others and is proven to be effective, while at the same time having a reduced impact on the environment. Working with a distributor, operations managers can select the products that are most effective for their facilities.

Another easy step, which can produce significant results, is to switch from conventional to compact fluorescent lighting (CFLs). These bulbs use 75% less power than conventional bulbs and can last 10 years.

* Dual flush toilets dispense .8 gallons of water per flush for liquid waste and 1.25 to 1.6 gallons for solid waste.

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