

St. Athanasius parishioners become environmentally thrifty

A new project at St. Athanasius, Curtis Bay, is expected to bring a little more green to the planet, parish grounds and church coffers.

With the delivery of a green and orange dumpster in the St. Athanasius parking lot last month, parishioners have been eagerly disposing their discarded paper products by the ton in a recycling effort they hope will create a more vibrant environment locally and globally.

Since parishioner Joe Piraino's Brooklyn Park neighborhood does not have curbside recycling, he was thrilled to have a place to bring his paper recyclables and has emptied them into the container weekly since its arrival.

"I bring it with me when I come to church in the morning," the 70-year-old retiree said. "It's easy. It's just like dropping your mail in the mail box. It's kind of like a drive through."

The recycling project at the parish has so far been well embraced, attracting a whopping 1.25 tons of paper products in a month that may have otherwise ended up in the landfill, said Mary Beth Barnes, pastoral associate at St. Athanasius.

However, not all of the recyclables making its way into the dumpster is coming from the parish waste cans or the households of churchgoers, Ms. Barnes said.

A 10-member group of parishioners called the St. Francis Committee make periodic sweeps of the several acres of church property, collecting trash - and much of it is recyclable.

"Residents in the neighborhood also bring their recyclable paper products to our dumpster," Ms. Barnes said. "We're seeing more and more people driving up to it each day, so we're thrilled with the results."

The paper products permitted in the recycling dumpster are newspapers,

magazines, catalogs, mail, envelopes, folders, fax and copy paper and colored paper. However, phone books are not accepted.

Though Abitibi Consolidated pays the parish less than \$20 for each ton of paper products it collects, St. Athanasius Pastor Father Robert A. DiMattei Jr. said every dollar counts and the long-term effect on the environment is priceless.

“Living in an area with little green, our Church property is an oasis, not only for wildlife, but for the gathering of people,” Father DiMattei said. “The inspiration for the St. Francis Committee came out of my personal devotion and love of St. Francis and his respect for all creation.”

The clean-up and recycling programs were initiated to set an example for the neighbors and the faithful, he said.

Eventually, the parish would also like to recycle bottles, cans, plastic and other materials, Ms. Barnes said, and that will be initiated once they find a company that recycles those products willing to place a bin on the church property.

“Our future plan includes inviting the parishioners to donate a tree in memory of a loved one,” Father DiMattei said. “This would give them some way to give back to their loved one and the community.”