

Recycling and Composting at Your Place of Worship

A Guide to Starting a Zero Waste Program



When you are committed to helping your place of worship to be sustainable, recycling and composting can be a part of that solution. There are a few things to consider as you plan and implement a program to reduce waste and conserve resources through recycling and composting:

WEEKLY SERVICES

A place of worship brings people together on a regular basis through services and religious education. This is an opportunity to work with the same group of people week after week to collectively make a big difference. In addition to the advantage of a consistent audience, you likely see some consistency in items that can be reduced, reused, recycled or composted. Here are a couple questions to ask as you plan where you can have the greatest impact with the smallest effort.

- Do you want to implement a recycling program?
- Do you want to implement a composting program?
- Are there items that can be recycled and composted on a regular basis?
 - Does your place of worship have a weekly bulletin that gets passed out at services? Is there an easy place to recycle that bulletin on your way out?
 - Is childcare offered during services and does this include paper to be recycled and a snack (potential recycling and composting)?
 - Church: Is communion served in recyclable communion cups? If so, are they being recycled?
 - Is there a post service gathering with coffee or food?

EVENTS

A place of worship brings many different people together for different events. Each meeting or social event will have its own group of people (sometimes these groups are members of the community not familiar with your space) and its own materials (serviceware, food, activities, etc.). This variety can pose a challenge to a recycling and composting program as you need attendees to know how to correctly sort materials and this takes both training and volunteer support.

- Does your place of worship offer space for outside community groups to hold events and meetings? What would you need to do to educate these outside groups about a recycling and/or composting program?
 - Are there events that occur repeatedly in your space? These might be a good place to start as you may have the same group of people using the same kinds of materials for reusing, recycling and composting.
 - Do you want to consider offering recycling/composting sorting stations only for events with groups who either know how to sort or agree to have volunteers guiding sorting? Other groups might only have landfill containers (garbage cans) available during their event.

- Places of worship bring people together in fellowship and this is often over food or drinks. Are these served using reusable cups/plates/etc.? If not, are these items recyclable or compostable?
 - Can you provide reusable serviceware for all events to keep items consistent?
 - If you do not have reusable serviceware, could you require and/or provide compostable/recyclable serviceware for events? This will impact your budget and/or the budget of those using the space if this is a requirement.

As you build a team and begin to plan your program, consider these questions and how a zero waste program can fit into your beliefs and goals. Small steps can make a big difference and it is important to be realistic about which things will be easily supported by your members and which things need to be nurtured along before being implemented. Many programs start by adding recycling or composting into one area before taking in on throughout the space. Others may consider starting with recycling and adding composting to key events when they know there will be good volunteer support.

PLANNING

- **Form a Team**– Work with the leadership of your place of worship, facility managers, and interested and committed members to configure a program that will serve your place of worship’s needs, interests, and capacities. Is there a lot of support within your membership for recycling, no matter the cost? Who will be some of the key champions for this program? Develop a mission and a plan for the program, and delegate responsibilities to the team members.

To get the most agreement, try to find a way to begin recycling/composting that doesn’t require money from the budget and that doesn’t distract leaders from their existing duties. Show the leadership that you have a plan for managing the whole program for a trial period, after which you can re-assess its effectiveness.

- **Set Goals: From Trash to Treasure**– Much of what we throw away is actually a valuable resource that can be conserved through recycling or composting.
 - What recyclable material gets thrown away most often? Paper bulletins? Plastic water bottles? Cardboard boxes?

Evaluating how much of each material your community produces and could be recycling will help you determine which services are needed, as you may be required to pay a fee for the recycling/composting you choose to do. It will also allow you to decide on a simple sorting system that will help you to have the greatest impact with the least confusion.

- **Find a Hauler**– Check with your current waste management service to learn what services it offers. What is your hauler providing now and what would it cost to change those services to meet the needs of your new program? If your hauler does not pick up recycling/compost from businesses or places of worship, are there other local haulers that can provide that service?

SETTING UP

- **Sorting stations and collection bins**– Set up sorting stations with bins in sensible places. If you're collecting mostly paper products, locate bins outside of the sanctuary so that members can recycle paper bulletins conveniently, or in the office or copy center. If food containers (bottles, cups, cans, etc.) comprise the bulk of your recyclables, place bins conveniently near a cafeteria, kitchen, or coffee. **Bins are moveable, so experiment with their position.** Watch people's behavior at events to see if you can reposition them more effectively, otherwise people give up and put their recyclables in the trash.

A complete Resource Recovery station may consist of:

- 1 (blue) recycling bin + sign
 - 1 (green) compost bin + sign
 - 1 (black) landfill bin + sign
 - 1 bucket for collecting liquid
- **Make it clear**– If the company or municipality you're working with doesn't provide you with bins to collect recyclables inside the building, get ones that people will notice, or even bins with your logo printed on them. You want it to be clear where people can recycle. Don't get bins that look just like your current trash cans and expect people to put the recycling in the right place!
 - **Signage**– Create and post signs that make the recycling guidelines clear, indicating what materials go in which bins. This is very important, and should be accompanied by other forms of communication (in the bulletin, from the pulpit). Nothing discourages or disgusts your waste collection volunteers more than seeing half-eaten plates of food dumped in the recycling by accident. Be prepared for this, be patient, and **keep reminding people how the system works.**

FIND VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF SUPPORT

- **Volunteers** - As you start recycling and/or composting, it is important to recognize the importance of the role of volunteers! Knowing what can be recycled or composted can be confusing. And you are asking people to do things in a new way. Assigning a volunteer (or pair of volunteers) to each sorting station can make your new program much more successful and fun for everyone.
- **Recycling collection**– Determine who will empty and maintain the indoor recycling bins so that they don't overflow and cause a mess or, worse, prevent others from putting recyclable materials in them. This is the hard part; be sure you have committed volunteers or willing staff support so you don't create a nuisance.

GET THE WORD OUT

- **Announce it**– Let your community know about the recycling/composting program so that everyone can be aware of it and fully participate in it. Explain how recycling/composting work and why your community is investing in it, and ask your congregation to participate in and pray for this new initiative.
- **Measure your success**– Consider **measuring how much recycled material your place of worship generates** and give periodic updates to keep your community in the loop and to encourage more ownership in the new program.

SORTING OF COMPOST/RECYCLING/LANDFILL



COMPOST	RECYCLE	LANDFILL
ALLOWED		
All food scraps (meat, bones, dairy, fruit and more)	Metal (soda cans)	Only things that you cannot compost or recycle
Food soiled paper	Glass	All straws
Some to-go containers	Plastic (#1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7)	Some to-go containers (with plastic lining)
	Water bottles	
NOT ALLOWED		
Plastic	Plastic without a number (saran wrap, bags, etc)	Compostable and recyclable items
Metal	Some to-go containers (with plastic lining)	
Stickers	Straws	
	Plastic #6 - Styrofoam	

SAMPLE Zero Waste Talking Points

_____ is working to be sustainable through recycling and composting. By introducing recycling and composting to this event, we can significantly reduce the amount of waste being sent to the landfill while showcasing that reducing waste can be easy. Help us to celebrate sustainability while enjoying the event.

What is Zero Waste?

Zero Waste is a goal for living our lives naturally and sustainably through conserving and recovering valuable resources. Much of what we throw away as waste is really a valuable resource that we can choose to recover through recycling and composting. In nature there is no garbage. Every byproduct from a natural cycle is used to fuel another. Zero Waste helps us to be good stewards of the environment.

How is this event Zero Waste?

Our goal is to make zero waste an integral part of the event so that attendees are zero waste without even thinking about it. We want people to have fun and enjoy themselves. We want them to look for a trash can only to learn that much of what they have is not trash as it can be recycled or composted. And we will have zero waste volunteers throughout the event to help guide attendees and answer questions to keep this easy and fun.

Why have a Zero Waste event?

Zero waste events are a great way to show your commitment to the environment while creating a model of zero waste for your guests. If hundreds of people eating and socializing can have a lot of fun and be sustainable, how hard is it for each of us to do this in our own lives?

What is the Zero Waste goal at this event?

We hope that our attendees have fun and that they find zero waste to be surprisingly easy. And we hope that they take that message home with them and that it ignites a spark that leads them to think and do things in a more sustainable way. Our ultimate goal is to hold an event that sends zero waste to the landfill.

Why Zero Waste?

- Nearly half of all U.S. landfills are full or have been closed because of groundwater contamination.
- In the Chicago area we currently have 5-6 years of landfill capacity. The state of Illinois has less than 25 years of landfill capacity.
- Establishing new landfills as a long-term strategy is not sustainable due to pollution (methane emissions, other greenhouse gas leaks, groundwater pollution, etc.), high landfill siting and maintenance costs, inadequate landfill closing accountability, and lack of interest among residents to live near sites.
- To achieve a sustainable system of managing our resources, communities must incorporate nature's law, **waste = food**, and channel materials into reuse and new production.