

# GREENING YOUR CHURCH KITCHEN

## DISHES & UTENSILS and NAPKINS & TABLECLOTHS

### Choice of Dishes & Utensils

- **Consider using church flatware and ceramic dishes at coffee hour and other events.**
- **Avoid paper and plastic plates and cups when possible. When necessary, look for recyclable paper products (usually without a plastic core or coating). Be sure to talk with your local Recycling Management personnel about what is acceptable. Plates that have only dry crumbs are often recyclable.**

If your church already has purchased flatware and china, it seems generally better to use these rather than purchasing throw-away items. Washing dishes is usually considered cheaper and less wasteful of resources than buying throw-away plates and cups over and over again. Your disposal options may help make this decision. The soil/clay used to make dishes has already been dug from the earth; the damage has already been done. Newly purchased paper and plastic wastes new resources of trees and oil that are better used for more urgent items or left in the ground to provide oxygen and clean air. If you do NOT have china or flatware, the decision may be more difficult. We did find a study done for a restaurant that found buying china was better than continuing to use paper plates.

### Washing Dishes

- **If you have a dishwasher that requires a certain type of dishwasher solution or powder, make every effort to find one with no phosphates and no chlorine. Use no more than required.**
- **If you do dishes by hand, likewise choose a non-phosphate, non-chlorine dishwashing soap.**
- **Don't let food dry on dishes; try not to rinse before washing or rinse as little as absolutely necessary for your system.**
- **Scrape waste food into your compost/worm bin container to the extent the foods are acceptable. For example, all coffee grounds can be placed in the worm bin food container.**
- **Make sure your water faucets have the water reducers (aerators) provided by the city or available at hardware stores.**
- **Letting dishes air dry is considered more sanitary than hand drying but may be difficult in a church situation. Turn the drying cycle to "Air" if you use a machine.**
- **Run a dishwasher only when it is full. Hand washing is better than dishwashing a small load.**

Washing dishes uses water and electricity, and many people have questioned whether/why washing is better than throwing paper plates away. Garbage is the bigger problem for most places like the Olympic Peninsula, where residents are no longer allowed to have a 'landfill' because of water and airport issues. Garbage is collected and hauled to Oregon. Trucking garbage to Oregon definitely contributes to global warming gases. For places like Seattle, where paper plates can be recycled or composted even when food-stained, the issue may be less clear-cut.

Yet can we really afford to be cutting trees for paper plates when we need the trees so desperately to produce OXYGEN to counterbalance the increasing volume of carbon dioxide? Can we really afford to be using oil to make products like plastic eating utensils that we then throw away when oil is becoming more and more scarce? Paper plates and cups definitely take longer to decompose than most food items. And there are issues of sanitation, bird and animal attraction, etc. if you are trying to compost them.

So, the bottom line seems to be that we need to do our local homework and talk with our local Recycling Management people about what they think works best for the local recycling system.

## **Napkins & Tablecloths**

- **Make colorful cloth napkins - enough for regular congregants plus visitors - to use at coffee hours and potlucks.**
- **If tablecloths are required, make or purchase cloths to fit the tables you use for various functions.**
- **Purchase above items at thrift stores if possible, as this has the added benefits of giving income to a worthy organization and not requiring use of new resources.**

Napkins, tablecloths, and towels do need to be laundered but can often be added to loads that are already going to be washed at home. They do NOT need to be dried in a dryer, nor do they need to be ironed. Once enough are in supply, paper napkins and towels can be kept to a minimum. Thus garbage is reduced, as is the cost of frequently resupplying paper products. Note that paper towels generally cannot be recycled because they are intentionally constructed to hold water when wet without breaking down.

Good-sized napkins can be made by purchasing 15-inch lengths of 45-inch-wide fabric. These can be cut into 3 nearly square pieces after selvages have been removed. Small hems leave a roughly 14-inch-square napkin.