



What do we do with all our garbage?

Garbage and what to do with it has been a problem ever since Adam and Eve tossed the first banana peel behind some bushes in the Garden of Eden. Fortunately, God designed his creation with a built-in composting and recycling system. Nature took care of things for centuries, but eventually people got creative themselves, building stuff, experimenting and inventing all sorts of things from the elements of God's creation, making a lot of garbage and waste in the process. People living in the country just dumped stuff in the woods. Such was standard procedure even into the middle of the past century. But those living in cities and towns had to come up with a different solution, and so the "dump" was invented. Archaeologists have a great time figuring out lots of things about ancient peoples from what they find in their dumps. What will their counterparts sifting through our mountains of waste centuries off into the future learn about us and how we lived?

Consider what your family throws away. Depending on the ages of folks in your family, your list may include paper, cardboard, plastic bags, glass and plastic jars and bottles, packaging material, cans, food scraps, broken stuff from your house, grass clippings, soiled diapers, and dog poop (yuck!). After separating everything into trash and recycling containers, you place them at the curb for your weekly collection day. Waste and recycling collection vehicles equipped with cameras and sophisticated sensors pick up the containers with automated arms, empty the contents in their compacter, and replace the containers neatly (usually) curbside.



Here in San Felix, we don't have curbside pickup. No vehicles pass through our neighborhoods collecting trash. Instead, people haul their garbage and dump it in hundreds of piles along roadways such as that pictured in the photo to the right. Eventually a garbage truck will show up, sometimes with a bobcat, but more commonly with a team of workers who shovel the garbage into the truck, always leaving a little behind for the next time...kind of a starter set.

As bad as that looks and sounds, it should be said that our garbage is different from Minnesota garbage. Venezuelans produce far less waste than the more than a ton per person per year in Minnesota. They have far less stuff and what they do have gets repaired, repurposed and used long after a typical family in Minnesota would have thrown it away. When they spend nearly all their income on food, nothing edible is ever wasted.

We don't have sophisticated recycling centers (44% of Minnesota waste is recycled, yea!) or waste-to-energy facilities as the seven functioning in Minnesota, but between Mother Nature (the positive part) and people scavenging (the sad part), there is a recycling process at work. First are the dozens of scroungy street dogs that pick through the piles for bones and scraps. Next on nature's clean-up crew are the vultures gathering by the dozens, picking at whatever the dogs left behind. They're rather timid birds, courteously hopping out of the way should someone pass nearby. Meanwhile, the hot Venezuelan sun plays its part, drying up everything from banana peels to baby diapers. Then there's the sadder part of the recycling process...the human side. It's a common everyday sight to see people picking through the piles of garbage for anything recyclable. And when the garbage trucks arrive at the city dump at Cambalache, they are received by dozens of people, often families with little kids as pictured here, who earn their livelihood on the proceeds of recycling whatever those plying the piles around the city may have missed.



Finding effective ways to deal with waste materials is vital for the future of our planet. It's great that many people are helping by following the three R's of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Here at Jesucristo Resucitado we are initiating a program to encourage families to compost organic waste into nutrient-rich soil rather than add to the piles of trash around our city. Maybe composting would be a good project for your family as you consider various ways you can respect and care for this beautiful world God created for us and future generations.

Points to ponder

How can you help take better care of God's creation and reduce the impact of garbage?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org or 651-368-7324.