

HUMAN COMPOSTING

FACT SHEET

The Maryland General Assembly is considering legalizing human composting (also called “natural organic reduction” or “terramation”) in our state. Human composting is a process of placing a deceased person in a container, usually metal and in a warehouse, along with dirt, fungi and other materials, for weeks or months until the body breaks down. Bones may need to be manually broken down.

At the end, the person’s remains are mixed in 400 pounds of dirt — about the same as 36 bags of mulch. Without your knowledge, you could be walking on human remains, eating produce grown with human remains, or your kids could be playing in dirt mixed with human remains.



1 Not environmentally friendly.

This is not what is known as a “green” burial. Human composting typically occurs in warehouses filled with cubic-yard metal boxes. An environmentally friendly “green” burial — already legal in Maryland and consistent with our Catholic faith — means burying a deceased loved one in a shroud or simple wood box that is placed directly in the ground. This respects the dignity of the person and the environment.

2 Not affordable; nowhere to mourn.

The cost of human composting currently is about \$5,000 to \$7,000. Plus you have to figure out what you would do with 400 pounds of dirt with your loved one’s remains mixed in, even if, as Catholics, that were permitted. Add onto that the expense of building warehouses and the other requirements for this complex process and the costs add up.

3 Not Catholic; disrespects the human person.

Our faith calls us to respect the human body. This includes burial of a person’s body or cremains: “By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body,[8] and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity.[9]...”
(Instruction Ad resurgendum cum Christo)

What the Church says.

The human body, created by God, must be respected at all times.

“The end result of the human composting process is also disconcerting. . . . The body and the plant material have all decomposed together to yield a single mass of compost. What is left is approximately a cubic yard of compost that one is invited to spread on a lawn or in a garden or in some wilderness location. . . . There is nothing distinguishably left of the body to be placed in a casket or an urn and laid to rest in a sacred place where Christian faithful can visit for prayer and remembrance.

“Furthermore, burial in a cemetery or another sacred place adequately corresponds to the piety and respect owed to the bodies of the faithful departed who through Baptism have become temples of the Holy Spirit and in which ‘as instruments and vessels the Spirit has carried out so many good works.’[10]”

*“On the Proper Disposition of Bodily Remains”
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
Committee on Doctrine, March 20, 2023*



Put your faith into action. Join the Catholic Advocacy Network.

Archdiocese of Baltimore | Archdiocese of Washington | Diocese of Wilmington | mdcatholic.org/joincan | @mdcatholic