



Presbyterian Women's Eco-justice Initiative



"Within the next 10 to 15 years, the human race will largely determine its own survival, and that of countless other species . . . We are at a crossroads, and radical changes in current energy policies, capitalist economies and collective and individual lifestyles are required to mitigate and prepare for an ecological collapse never experienced in all of human history."

—William Brown, Columbia Seminary

Did you know?

- Caring for God's creation is an act of faith.
- God's creation is suffering from waste and reckless consumption of earth's resources. That consumption and waste has led to a crisis for the world's oceans and marine life.
- **10 million tons** of trash (mostly plastic) get dumped in the ocean each year. How much is 10 million tons? That is the weight of **4 billion** five-pound bags of sugar (or 66,667 adult blue whales). By 2050, the weight of plastic in the ocean will surpass the weight of fish in the ocean.¹
- Plastic waste kills wildlife, especially in the ocean. Marine life is literally choking on plastic. Scientists have found microplastics inside 114 different aquatic species.²
- There is a patch of garbage, mostly plastic, in the Pacific Ocean that is two times the size of Texas.³ It's one of four.
- There is now **9.2 billion tons** of plastic in the environment, of which **6.9 billion tons** are waste.⁴ How much is 6.9 billion tons? Nearly 14,000,000,000,000 pounds, or 14 trillion pounds! And half of that was made within the last 15 years!⁵
- **One trillion** plastic bags are used **each year** worldwide (2 million each minute!) Fewer than one percent get recycled.⁶
- Since China has stopped taking recyclables from western nations, the waste is piling up. Amy Brooks, the lead author of a study published in *Scientific Advances*, says it is ending up in landfills, being incinerated or sent to other countries "that lack the infrastructure to properly manage it."⁷
- How long does it take plastic to decompose? It depends on where it ends up, but scientists estimate about 450 years.⁸
- Plastic waste contributes to climate change.
- Some species are being driven to extinction by plastic pollution and global warming.⁹
- Ocean pollution cripples local economies that rely on the ocean's bounty for livelihoods.¹⁰

Learn about the urgency of climate change

- Fourth National Climate Assessment; www.globalchange.gov/nca4
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Global Warming; www.ipcc.ch/sr15/
- Coral Davenport, "Major Climate Report Describes a Strong Risk of Crisis as Early as 2040," *New York Times*, October 7, 2018; www.nytimes.com/2018/10/07/climate/ipcc-climate-report-2040.html
- Additional reports on the UN climate change website: www.un.org/en/climatechange/reports.shtml
- Screen *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore.

Call for change

- Call for legislation that replaces fossil fuels with sustainable sources of energy.
- Ask for legislation that requires a language change on plastic products from "disposable" to "recyclable."
- Work for local ordinances that discourage or outlaw the use of plastic bags by local retailers (including chains).
- Ask state legislatures to fund recycling facilities in each state (enough to handle the volume of waste generated in each state). Ask federal lawmakers for funding to support this.
- Tell corporations to end plastic pollution of oceans. Some of the largest producers of plastic packaging are Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Unilever, Starbucks, Procter & Gamble, and McDonald's. You can join Greenpeace.org in putting pressure on these companies to find alternatives to single-use plastic.

Act faithfully

- Pray for wisdom and discernment for your PW group's efforts to intercede on behalf of God's creation.
- Consider joining Presbyterians for Earth Care. See <https://presbyearthcare.org>. Become an Earth Care Congregation.





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Photo courtesy of Greenpeace.org.



Courtesy of Second Presbyterian, St. Louis.

"All day in a tropical rainforest, not one insect was captured. It was just astonishing. It marked a 98 percent loss of biomass for insects captured this way."

—Brad Lister¹¹

See www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/environment/earth-care-congregations/.

- Take PHP's Climate Care Challenge and commit to two steps to care for the environment. See www.pcusa.org/ccc.
- Give up plastics for Lent. Find a calendar at <http://rupertslandnews.ca/less-plastic-for-lent/>. Use it any time of year!
- Plant trees. Make it a church/community project!
- Make better choices in your food consumption. Choose seafood that is fished or farmed in ways that have less impact on the environment (see seafoodwatch.org). Eat less (or no) meat. Grow more of your own food. Buy less-than-perfect fruits and vegetables. (See npr.org for stories on food waste and efforts to reduce food waste.)
- Bring your own takeout containers to restaurants. Ask the restaurant to consider alternatives to styrofoam and plastic. Suggest worldcentric.com products as alternatives.
- Avoid the use of single-use plastic straws. There are great alternatives available—metal, paper, washable rubber.
- Avoid driving when you can walk, bicycle or take public transportation.
- Join a Sacred Activism event or pledge to be a Faith Climate Voter during Faith Climate Action Week. Learn more at faithclimateactionweek.org.
- Connect with Creation Justice Ministries (www.creationjustice.org) and the Hunger Program (pcusa.org/hunger)
- Support groups working to clean up oceans, such as 4Ocean and others working on new technologies to break down plastic and remove it from the ocean.
- Get creative. Remember the mantra "Reduce, reuse, recycle"? Is there a use for discarded plastic bags? Weave a reusable shopping bag! Find other ways to reuse items.
- Download an app to your phone that lets you check whether food products you buy use responsibly sourced palm oil. Learn more at www.cmzoo.org.
- Plant bee-friendly gardens. Certify your garden with the New York Bee Sanctuary (newyorkbeesanctuary.org). Join

the National Pollinator Garden Network's efforts to create pollinator habitats (see millionpollinatorgardens.org).

- Hold a Blessing of the Butterflies—See www.presbyterianmission.org/eco-journey/2019/11/18/butterfly-blessing/.
- Recycle cell phones and batteries. Your congregation could partner with a local recycling agency and hold a "Cell Phone Sunday" or "Battery Collection Sunday."
- Search for alternatives to single-use plastics in your home and church life—communion cups, dinnerware and flatware at church suppers and family reunions, and so forth. See worldcentric.com for compostable alternatives.
- Support the work of groups such as Appalachian Wildlife Refuge in Western North Carolina (appalachianwild.org).
- Spend \$50 to fix your sewing machine instead of replacing it. Wear your clothes another season before replacing them. Re-cover your sofa instead of buying a new one.
- Purchase your electricity from a utility that uses wind power to generate electricity. Turn off the lights when you can.

Notes

1. World Economic Forum, "The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics," January 2016, 7.
2. 4Ocean.org, "Ocean Plastic Recovery," March 2019.
3. Jennifer Earl, "Great Pacific Garbage Patch . . . Now Twice the Size of Texas," Fox News, March 22, 2018.
4. Laura Parker, "We Made Plastic. We Depend on Plastic. Now We're Drowning in It." *National Geographic*, June 2018.
5. Ibid.
6. Earth Policy Institute fact sheet, www.earth-policy.org.
7. Sarah Kiley Watson, "China Has Refused to Recycle the West's Plastics: Now What?" NPR, June 28, 2018.
8. Parker.
9. Meghna Chakrabarti, "The Cost Of Climate Change Across the Animal Kingdom," *OnPoint*, WBUR Boston.
10. Olin Jenner, "Plastic Pollution Is Growing Threat to Maine's Fisheries," *Bangor Daily News*, May 2, 2017.
11. Brad Lister of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in WBUR interview with Meghna Chakrabarti about an insect study done recently in the Puerto Rican rainforest (see Note 9).

