

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

**Free from Plastic Pollution
Resolution of Witness**

Submitted by the Florida Conference

SUMMARY

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental issues in the 21st century. The increased production of disposable plastic products and the failure of manufacturers to recycle plastic bottles and single use plastics is overwhelming the waste management and the disposal of plastics into landfills or improper disposal. In developing nations with less efficient waste disposal systems, they are disposed and are breaking down and polluting the environment. Plastics pollution has escalated and have become ubiquitous in the soil, water, and the food system. It impacts the health of human and more than human life. It is time that United Church of Christ join environmental organizations, faith communities, and other concerned groups to take action to reduce the plastic pandemic that impacts and threatens life and God's creation

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Two scriptures can be read together as a biblical tool kit to understand the plastic pandemic. The first is Psalm 24:1, which declares, "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it." The Earth is Lord's, and the Earth is a sacred common good for all life. The Psalm declares that the Earth remains a gift from the Creator to be shared with humanity and the extended biotic community. Our biblical heritage claims that Spirit is present in and cares for all creation and that the Earth's land and other goods are to be respected and used by all biokind. The Earth is both a home, for it is a sacrament for responsible and respectful use.

The second scripture depicts the consequences that occur when God is sidelined from the notion of the Earth belonging to the Lord. The Earth is desacralized; it becomes a possession and a commodity.

The second scripture is Isaiah 24: 3-6, "The Earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled ... The Earth dries, withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the Earth. The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the Earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore, the inhabitants of the Earth dwindled, and few people are left."

The prophets in Hebrew scriptures envisioned a causal relation between the violation of Earth boundaries and the subsequent destructive consequences. In Jeremiah 4:23-26, the poet understands such consequences as a de-creation or unfolding of creation. Human sinfulness unravels the poetic Genesis account of creation (1:1-2:6)

Bill McKibben, environmentalist and co-founder of 350.org, describes this causal relation of transgression and consequence as "de-creation."

40 We are engaged in the swift and systematic de-creation of the planet we were born into...
41 we have even more rapidly destroyed its inventory of life...n our time, the morally
42 transcendent question is whether we will stop the decreation before it goes further;
43 whether we will take the difficult steps to preserve God's creation as intact integral as for
44 as is still possible."¹

45
46 Political arrogance and corporate greed have precipitated a global plastics crisis with almost no
47 regulation, and whose consequences have deeply impacted human and non-human animal health,
48 and the environment. Plastics pollute the Earth and degrade into microplastics spreading into the
49 atmosphere, land, and ocean on a massive scale.

50 51 ETHICAL RATIONALE

52
53 Eco-theologian Sallie McFague claims principles how humanity may live responsibly,
54 sustainably, and justly with the household of the Earth. She gives their planetary household
55 rules: 1) Take your share, 2) Clean up after yourself, 3) Keep the house in good repair for future
56 occupants.² These rules form a critique of current destructive economies and rules for
57 economies of life.

58
59 Our production of plastics violates all three principles. According to the United Nations
60 Environmental Programme, "Around the world, one million plastic drinking bottles are
61 purchased every minute, while 5 trillion single-use plastic bags are used worldwide every year.
62 In total, half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once — and then thrown away....
63 Today, we produce 300 million tons of plastic waste each year. That is nearly the equivalent to
64 the weight of the entire human population. "³

65
66 Plastics are made from harmful petrochemical ingredients that impact the health and well-being
67 of biological life and planetary ecosystems. The durability of plastics means they resist
68 degradation for hundreds of years. Plastics do breakdown into microplastics that enter our land
69 and water ecosystems. Animals, birds, fish, and humans consume microplastics.⁴ Human and
70 non-human life have digested large amounts of microplastics.⁵ The average person eats 70,000
71 microplastics each year which works out to about 100 bits of microplastics over the course of
72 just one meal, according to a study published in Environmental Pollution. Consumed
73 microplastics adversely threaten the health and well-being of humanity and non-human animal
74 and fish life.

75
76 A report by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in partnership with the World Economics Forum
77 found that if plastic pollution continues at this rate, that the amount of plastic in the ocean will
78 contain more plastic than fish by 2050

79
80 Currently, only 9% of all plastic waste produced is recycled. About 12% is incinerated, while the
81 rest — 79% — has accumulated in landfills, dumps, the ecosystems, and oceans of the planet.

82
83 At the writing of this resolution some of the worst plastic bottle polluters, the American
84 Beverage Association has launched a new initiative, Every Bottle Back, a campaign of the
85 leading beverage companies, which they hope will lead to more recycling of plastic bottles to

86 reduce our plastic footprint.⁶ Every minute 1 million bottled plastic bottles are purchased
87 globally.⁷ Unfortunately, these beverage companies are putting the responsibility back on the
88 consumers. This campaign has not ⁸worked in the past.

89
90 Our rivers carry plastic waste from land to the seas and oceans, and they become major
91 distributors of plastic pollution. In the Middle of the Pacific Ocean, there is a floating island of
92 plastic waste, covering nearly 800,000 square miles. ⁹

93
94 In a Nairobi Report (March 2021), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and
95 environmental justice non-governmental organization, Azul¹⁰ . The report calls for the
96 recognition of communities affected by plastic waste and their inclusion in local decision
97 making.¹¹ Plastic pollution disproportionately affects marginalized communities and
98 communities living in close proximity to plastic production and waste sites, constituting an
99 environmental injustice. It details cases of environmental injustice – from deforestation and
100 displacement of Indigenous Peoples to make way for oil extraction and the contamination of
101 potable water by fracking fluids and waste water in the US and Sudan, to health problems among
102 predominantly African American communities living near oil refineries in the US’s Gulf of
103 Mexico, and the occupational hazards of about two million waste pickers in India, among many
104 others.

105
106 “Environmental justice means educating those on the frontlines of plastic pollution about its
107 risks, including them in decisions about its production, use, and disposal, and ensuring their
108 access to a credible judicial system,” said UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen. The UCC
109 has a long history of environmental justice and concern for the inequities of poor peoples of
110 color harmed by petrochemical production facilities

111
112 Plastic waste threatens the livelihoods¹² of those who depend on marine resources for work. It
113 leads to health issues¹³ for people who consume seafood infested with toxic microplastics. Plastic
114 pollution has threatened us with biodiversity loss.

115
116 We have a plastic pandemic rapidly growing, polluting the environment and impacting life. It is
117 time to work against further proliferation.

118
119 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

120
121 **WHEREAS** the scriptures hold us responsible for the way we co-live and use God’s creation,

122
123 **WHEREAS** United Church of Christ General Synods have passed environmental resolutions
124 The Earth is the Lord’s¹⁴ (2017), The Use of Plastic Foam¹⁵ (2019), and The Rights of Nature¹⁶
125 (2021).

126
127 **WHEREAS** the United Nations has called upon global faith communities to work against plastic
128 pollution,¹⁷

129
130 **WHEREAS** plastic pollution is an environmental justice and concern of the UCC,¹⁸

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132 **WHEREAS** current attempts, locally, nationally, and internationally to manage plastic pollution
133 are woefully inadequate

134
135 **WHEREAS** environmental justice on plastics impacts disproportionately upon poor and
136 vulnerable peoples of color and must be addressed from production to waste.¹⁹

137
138 **WHEREAS** plastics are made from harmful petrochemicals that impact the health and well-
139 being of biological life and planetary ecosystems; their production of toxic petrochemical harm
140 disproportionately the poor living in close proximity.²⁰

141
142 **WHEREAS** plastics resist degrading for hundreds of years, and they break down into
143 microplastic beads, and animals, birds, fish, and humans consume microplastics.²¹

144
145 **WHEREAS** local cleanups of plastic litter have limited impact, as there is no place for collected
146 plastic.²²

147
148 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod speaks truth to the
149 public square against plastic pollution of the planet

150
151 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod encourages all settings
152 of the Church to determine the best pathway forward for strategies and actions to mitigate plastic
153 pollution, using as examples the following.

154
155 Resources for congregational participation in addressing plastic pollution include:

- 156 • The Story of Plastics, (95 minute documentary)²³
- 157 • Sierra Club Solutions to Plastic Pandemic²⁴
- 158 • Plastic Toolkit of the ten towns of New Hampshire.²⁵
- 159 • Concrete suggestions from: National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF): Join
160 the Fight for Reducing Plastic Pollution²⁶,
- 161 • To hold accountable the worst corporate polluters: Break Free Plastics: resources,
162 articles, lists the worst corporate polluters and suggestions for actions.²⁷

163
164 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod encourages the
165 Conference Associations, Congregations, and other settings of the United Church of Christ to
166 reduce the use of single-use plastics and packaging.

167
168 Actions for congregational participation in addressing plastic pollution include:

- 169 • Encouraging all settings of the Church to commit to change from the throwaway and
170 disposable culture to reusable and compostable products.
- 171 • Preaching on ecological sustainability principles articulated by Sallie McFague²⁸ on
172 responsible use of ecological resources and the sustainable goal of mitigating single-use
173 plastics.
- 174 • Changing our consumptive practices: moving to recyclable or compostable solutions.
175 Committing to reducing the use of plastics or looking for recyclable alternatives.²⁹
- 176 • Preaching on ecological sustainability principles on responsible use of ecological
177 resources and the sustainable goal of mitigating single-use plastics.

- 178 • Educating on the importance of mitigation of single-use plastics and plastic straws as
179 well as plastic bottles at our churches, their events, and gatherings. Replacing these with
180 recyclable alternatives such as disposable and bio-degradable substitutes.
- 181 • Educating our folks to the toxicity of microplastics to the health of our environment, to
182 our own health, and the health of non-human life.
- 183 • Advocating for solutions on plastics and support local and state bans or fees on single use
184 plastics.
- 185 • Advocating for solutions on plastics whether through mitigation efforts and campaigns to
186 support local and state bans on all single use plastics.
- 187 • Raising awareness of plastic pollution and the dangers to human, non-human life,
188 ecosystems, and the planet.
- 189 • Actively supporting H.R.2238 — 117th Congress (2021-2022), Free From Plastics
190 Pollution Bills³⁰ in Congress³¹ and the Senate Bill S.984 — 117th Congress (2021-2022)
191 Break Free Plastics Act, or similar bills.³²
- 192 • Urging the support of the US for the UN Global Conference on “End Plastic Pollution,
193 February 2022.”³³
- 194 • Organizing a Zero Waste Event; Support Restaurants that choose to use reusable
195 containers; support grocery stores that use reusable bags; lobby for ban in single-use
196 plastics in your community.³⁴
- 197 • Participating in public cleanup of river banks, parks, and beaches³⁵,
- 198 • Installing fountains for water bottles in church campuses, wherever possible.
- 199

200 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod encourages all settings to
201 speak truth to the public square against plastic pollution of the planet.

202

203 **Funding:** The funding for the implementation of the Resolution be made in accordance with
204 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

205

206 **Implementation:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate miniseries or other
207 entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ Bill McKibben, “Climate Change and the Unraveling of Creation,,” The Christian Century, December 9, 8, 1999, 1196-97.

² Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology, God, the World, and Global Warming, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008, 53.

³ <https://www.unep.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>

⁴ 7 Foods that Contain Microplastics and How to Avoid them, <https://www.everythingbagsinc.com/blog/foods-containing-microplastics/>

⁵ Microplastics exposure can cause toxicity through oxidative stress, inflammatory lesions, and increased uptake or translocation. Several studies have demonstrated the potentiality of metabolic disturbances, neurotoxicity, and increased cancer. Plastic Health Summit 2021: One Health, <https://www.plastichealthcoalition.org/>, Brian Quinn, “Effects of Microplastics on Human Health, “ [PowerPoint Presentation \(nwwac.org\)](https://www.plastichealthcoalition.org/)

⁶ Every Bottle Back, <https://cedarspringswater.ca/blog/eco-friendly-alternatives-disposable-plastic-water-bottles/>

⁷ Drowning in Plastics, <https://graphics.reuters.com/ENVIRONMENT-PLASTIC/0100B275155/index.html#:~:text=Around%20the%20world%2C%20almost%201,bottles%20are%20purchased%20every%20minute.>

⁸ Azul <https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/>

⁹ Reckoning with the US Role in the Global Ocean Plastic Waste, The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Health, Dember 2021.

file:///C:/Users/revdr/OneDrive/Desktop/Plastics/Ocean_Plastic_Waste_Highlights_2021%20(1).pdf

¹⁰ Azul <https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/neglected-environmental-justice-impacts-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution>

¹² <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9229en/ca9229en.pdf>

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¹⁴ https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/unitedchurchofchrist/pages/9126/attachments/original/1499204117/UCC_Synod_2017_Climate_Resolution_-_FINAL_as_passed.pdf?1499204117

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¹⁵ [GS32-Minutes.pdf \(uccfiles.com\)](#) page 48

¹⁶ [Approved UCCB-21-10-04-Minutes33rdGeneralSynod_10.15.2021w-App.pdf](#) page 42

¹⁷ UN Calls Upon Faith Communities to work against Plastic Pollution, Crux, February 22, 2022, [U.N. wants faith groups to help work against plastic pollution | Crux \(cruxnow.com\)](#)

¹⁸ Both the Florida UCC Conference and the New Hampshire UCC Conferences have passed resolutions at the 2022 Annual Gatherings.

¹⁹ Picking Up Litter: Pointless or Powerful Tool in he battle of plastic pollution?" UN Environmental Porgramme, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/picking-litter-pointless-exercise-or-powerful-tool-battle-beat-plastic-Programme>

²⁰ 'Do Plaastics Make Us Sick?' " Plastics Health Colaition, <https://www.plastichealthcoalition.org/>

²¹ The environmental impacts of plastics and micro-plastics use, waste and pollution: EU and national measures, Study Requestd by the PETI Committte, European Parliament,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658279/IPOL_STU\(2020\)658279_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658279/IPOL_STU(2020)658279_EN.pdf)

²² <https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-plastic-documentary-film/how-to-watch/>

²³ <https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/zero-waste/story-of-plastic>

²⁴ <https://www.10towns.org/resources/plastic-pollution-book-list>

²⁵ <https://www.neefusa.org/nature/water/join-fight-reduce-plastic-pollution>

²⁶ <https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/>

²⁷ Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology, God, the World, and Global Warming, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008

²⁸ See Yes Magazine The Solving of the Plastics Issue, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/solving-plastic> Also see eco-friendly alternatives, [Eco-Friendly Alternatives for Disposable Plastic Water Bottles | Cedar Springs Blog \(cedarspringswater.ca\)](#)

²⁹ Listen <https://media-na.readspeaker.com/cache/231abadb0e1b135a4e0b13ae492f28c1/BillSummary-117-house-bill-2238.mp3>

³⁰ [https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/984#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20(03%2F25%2F2021)&text=This%20bill%20sets%20fo)

[bill/984#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20\(03%2F25%2F2021\)&text=This%20bill%20sets%20fo](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/984#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20(03%2F25%2F2021)&text=This%20bill%20sets%20fo)
rth%20requirements,or%20compost%20products%20and%20materials.

³¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112972>

³⁴ Organize a Zero Waste event in yYour Community, Gren Peace,
<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/toolkit-plastic-free-future/organise-a-zero-waste-event/>

³⁵ See Green Peace, <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/toolkit-plastic-free-future/>