

Resolution of Witness Free from Plastic Pollution ¹

A resolution prepared by the New Hampshire Environmental Justice Team of the UCC Conference.

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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.” It states that the Earth is the Lord’s, and the Earth is a sacred common good for all life. The Earth remains a gift from the Creator to be shared in common by humanity and the extended biotic community. Our biblical heritage claims that the 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 second scripture depicts the consequences that ensue when God is sidelined from the notion that the Earth belongs to the Lord. The Earth is desacralized; it becomes a possession and a commodity. 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.

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

We are engaged in the swift and systematic de-creation of the planet we were born into... we have even more rapidly destroyed its inventory of life... In our time, the morally transcendent question is whether we will stop the de-creation before it goes further; whether we will take the difficult steps to preserve God’s creation intact as far as is still possible.”²

¹ This resolution was inspired by the United Methodist Conference “Plastic And Foam Free Florida Resolution” 2019.

² Bill McKibben, “Climate Change and the Unraveling of Creation,,” The Christian Century, December 9, 8, 1999, 1196-97.

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

ETHICAL RATIONALE

Eco-theologian Sallie McFague tells how humanity may live responsibly, sustainably, and justly with the household of the Earth. She gives these planetary household rules: 1) Take your share, 2) Clean up after yourself, 3) Keep the house in good repair for future occupants.³

Our production of plastics violates all three principles. According to the United Nations Environmental Program, “Around the world, one million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute, while 5 trillion single-use plastic bags are used worldwide every year. In total, half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once — and then thrown away.... Today, we produce 300 million tons of plastic waste each year. That is nearly the equivalent to the weight of the entire human population.”⁴

Plastics are made from harmful petrochemical ingredients that impact the health and well-being of biological life and planetary ecosystems. The durability of plastics means they resist degradation for hundreds of years. Plastics eventually break down into microplastics that enter our land and water ecosystems. They are consumed by animals, birds and fish, and they in turn are consumed by humans.⁵ Human and non-human life have digested large amounts of microplastics.⁶

Currently, only 9% of all plastic waste is recycled. About 12% is incinerated, while the rest — 79% — accumulates in landfills, dumps, oceans and the ecosystems of the planet. The American Beverage Association has launched a new initiative called “Every Bottle Back”, a campaign of the leading beverage companies which they hope will lead to more recycling of plastic bottles to reduce our plastic footprint.⁷ Every minute 1 million bottled plastic bottles are purchased

³ Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology, God, the World, and Global Warming*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008, 53.

⁴ <https://www.unep.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>

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

⁶ 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/)

⁷ Every Bottle Back, <https://cedarspringswater.ca/blog/eco-friendly-alternatives-disposable-plastic-water-bottles/>

globally but only a small number are recycled.⁸ Unfortunately, these beverage companies are putting the responsibility back on the consumers. This campaign has not worked in the past.

Our rivers carry plastic waste from land to the seas and oceans, and they become major distributors of plastic pollution. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean there is a floating island of plastic waste, covering nearly 800,000 square miles.⁹ It is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans.

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

THE RESOLUTION

Whereas the scriptures hold us responsible for the way we co-live and use God's creation, the Earth,

Whereas the General Synod has passed other environmental resolutions [The Earth is the Lord's (2017), The Use of Plastic Foam (2019), and The Rights of Nature (2021)] to protect the Earth,

Whereas the United Nations has called upon global faith communities to work against plastic pollution,¹⁰

Whereas we as a church are called to speak truth to power against plastic de-creation and pollution, even when it is inconvenient or difficult,

Whereas local cleanups of plastic litter have limited impact and recycling is not effective for most plastic items,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ (NHCUCC) encourage the Conference associations and congregations to reduce the use of single-use plastics and packaging within their churches and church-related gatherings,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the NHCUCC encourage our associations and congregations to commit to changing from a disposable culture to a reusable, sustainable one,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the NHCUCC encourage education within our congregations and in our communities to advocate for alternatives to single use plastics, whether through mitigation efforts and campaigns or by supporting local and state bans on single use plastics,

⁸ Drowning in Plastics, <https://graphics.reuters.com/ENVIRONMENT-PLASTIC/0100B275155/index.html#:~:text=Around%20the%20world%2C%20almost%201,bottles%20are%20purchased%20every%20minute>.

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 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 \(cruxnow.com\)](https://www.cruxnow.com/news/un-calls-upon-faith-communities-to-work-against-plastic-pollution/)

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the NHCUCC actively advocate support for the “Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act” in Congress (H.R.2238 in the House and S.984 in the Senate¹¹),

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the NHCUCC submit this resolution in appropriate form for consideration at the Thirty-fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, possibly in conjunction with the Florida Conference and other UCC Conferences.

¹¹ [https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/984#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20\(03%2F25%2F2021\)&text=This%20bill%20sets%20forth%20requirements,or%20compost%20products%20and%20materials.](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/984#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20(03%2F25%2F2021)&text=This%20bill%20sets%20forth%20requirements,or%20compost%20products%20and%20materials.)