



*The Earth is Sacred, Not Ours to Wreck*

## **How to reduce your use of plastics, one step at a time**

# Week 1



Isaiah 24: 4-5 *“The earth dries up and withers; the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants.”*

## Why plastics?

Plastics are made from petrochemicals and the production of plastics is booming around the world. Partly driven by the popularity of plastics, the increase in production is also driven by the surplus of natural gas. A byproduct of natural gas, ethane, is released during fracking and made into polyethylene. Shell, and Exxon Mobile are some of the firms engaged in the production of plastic.

## What are the problems?

We don't know the long-term implications for the impact of plastics on the environment. It can be found everywhere – in the stomachs of whales, in birds and Oregon shellfish, in the soil, in tap water, in salt, and in us. We've seen the pictures of dead whales full of plastics and the islands of floating plastic in the sea.

Research estimates only 10% of our plastic waste is recycled. Plastic takes a very long time to break down. A single use plastic bag, for instance, takes 100 years. When it breaks down, the world is left with microplastics, which often end up in the oceans and the food chain. Carried by the wind, these microscopic particles are also found in lakes, flood plains, Arctic ice, and the air we breathe.

## What to do?

Sacred Earth Matters modified a 2018 Lenten calendar used by the Anglican Church. Our goal:

- 1) re-use/recycle existing plastics in our homes;
- 2) develop strategies to cut down on the plastics coming into our homes; and
- 3) make our voices heard in our community and to the manufacturers and distributors of plastics.

Each week there will be specific suggestions to work toward these goals. Remember, plastics will not disappear overnight. You should choose the actions which best fit your lifestyle. Please consider carefully the suggestions for raising our voices. In combating the climate crisis, our collective action is far more effective than changes in our individual lives.

For this short week, look through the plastic calendar pages for the upcoming weeks in Lent. Also wander through your living space looking for possibilities for change.

## *Giver of life*

*In the midst of poisoned water, I weep for creation.*

*In the midst of polluted air, I weep for creation.*

*In the midst of mountains of waste, I weep for creation.*

# Week 2

Jane Goodall *“Only if we understand will we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall we all be saved.”*

## Kitchen

Look around your kitchen to see what plastics you can reuse, what you can replace, and what you should not buy again. Focus on your use of single use plastics. Most of us will continue to use existing reusable plastic containers, utensils, etc. until they're worn out.

- Replace plastic sink and vegetable brushes with ones that have wooden handles and compostable bristles.
- Use wooden utensils – they work just as well as plastic ones; use disposable wooden or rental cutlery for events which large numbers of people will be attending. Forgo tassel toothpicks.
- Use stainless-steel products instead of plastic ones – containers, ice packs (Oryx), straws, etc.
- Reuse cottage cheese, yogurt, and sour cream containers to freeze soup and leftovers; airtight stainless-steel containers are great for the freezer., too.
- Use glass containers; reuse jam and peanut butter jars. Glass can be used in freezers as long as you leave space at the top of the jar, but the glass can still become brittle. Be careful.
- Make/buy mesh or organic cotton produce bags for fruits and veggies; store greens in wet terry cloth bags; put cut celery sticks in a glass with water.
- Reuse small carryout containers to hold cut lemons, onions, etc. in the fridge.
- Use your own plates and bowls to cover leftovers on a plate instead of plastic cling wrap; also use reusable beeswax food wrap (rolls or pre-cut in various sizes). See Resources list.
- Use homemade linen bags for bread – they'll keep it fresh for several days, with or without the paper bag it came home in (having rejected the plastic bag option).

Use natural cleaning cloths – cotton or ones made from scrap materials. Avoid single-use wet wipes. Replace plastic sponges with natural ones.

Use biodegradable natural rubber latex gloves for food prep & cleaning; use leather oven mitts.

Reuse sturdy plastic bags. Most liners in cereal boxes are strong and washable; the ones that tear like paper are not recyclable. Be careful when you recycle plastics -- numbers 1, 2 and 5 recycle most easily. Check with your waste removal company.

It's better not to acquire any more plastic bags, but it's going to happen. Some of the bags you can't avoid getting (i.e. mail, newspaper delivery) can be dropped off at stores for recycling (Target, Fred Meyer, Safeway, etc.). Check [www.plasticfilmrecycling.com](http://www.plasticfilmrecycling.com) for types of bags and drop-off sites.

## Raise Your Voice

Talk to your friends and community members; ask them how they're reducing their use of plastic.

Ask people in your workplace and social media groups how they're dealing with plastics. Are they making steady progress in switching to non-plastic products? Are they receptive to hearing about some of the things you're now using or plan to procure?

# Week 3

Jeremiah 2:7 *“I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.”*

## Food Shopping

The gold standard is to buy in bulk to minimize or eliminate packaging. But you must also be careful to buy only what you can eat so as not to waste food and manufactured products.

PCC stores allow you to bring your own containers. Their deli counters also use compostable containers. If you don't have easy access to a PCC, consider visiting one every few months to purchase whole grains, beans, nuts, spices, olive oil, maple syrup, etc.

Try to buy fresh bread in paper bags. If that's not possible, wash and reuse the plastic bags.

Bring your own cloth bags for produce. Some stores provide paper bags near the fresh mushrooms. Large fruits and vegetables can be added to your cart without containers. Avoid things like 2 tomatoes on a styrofoam tray covered with plastic wrap.

Avoid meats and cheeses in plastic bags. Find a substitute at the deli counter wrapped in uncoated paper. Some stores have recyclable plastic trays covered with plastic film. Watch out for fish and meat counters that use both a plastic bag and plastic lined white paper. Frozen food bags can't be recycled.

Avoid fruit juice in plastic jugs. Many of the jugs are not recyclable.

Types of paper:

- White plastic lined paper used for fish and meat. It must be put in the garbage.
- Uncoated white/brown paper is also used for meat and fish. If it is clean, recycle it. If it is greasy, place in compost can.
- Parchment paper is coated with silicone (made from sand/quartz) and can be recycled.
- Wax paper can be purchased as rolls or sandwich bags. It is also used it to wrap items for the freezer. See Resources list. Compost it.

## Raise Your Voice

Talk to store managers. If the store has bulk foods, ask about bringing your own containers. Ask if plain paper can be substituted for plastic lined paper. Ask for changes in plastic wrapped produce, fish, and meat.

Ask your friends, relatives, and co-workers to talk to the workers and managers where they shop about eliminating/reducing the use of plastics and suggest alternative, compostable packaging.

Say thank you where you see positive changes.

# Week 4

Psalms 104: 25-30 *"There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small."*

## **The Bathroom**

Uncountable numbers of toothpaste tubes and other plastic products and microplastics from toiletry products end up in the sea.

Avoid products like facial scrubs with microbeads. Watch out for products with polyethylene listed as an ingredient.

Disposable razors are a big contributor to plastic waste. Use a razor with removable blades, instead.

Plastic bottles for use in the shower are another problem. Try to buy in bulk and re-fill containers. Or better yet, give up using body wash in plastic bottles and use bar soap – just as we used to do. Unilever recently pledged that its packaging for Dove beauty bars will be plastic free in 2020 and it is moving to 100% recycled plastic bottles for its liquid products. Of course, re-filling an existing plastic container is better, since most plastics recycle only once.

Liquid hand soap – Use bar soap or re-fill containers with soap purchased in large containers.

Find substitutes for single use products like cleaning wipes.

Recycle plastic containers used for over-the-counter medications with other plastic products; BUT take the pill bottles of prescription medications to a pharmacy for recycling.

Look for toothbrushes with compostable wooden handles. Also buy cotton swabs with paper sticks (Kroger is one brand).

## **Raise Your Voice**

If your favorite products are only available in small plastic containers, contact the manufacturer and/or seller and for other options, or at least larger containers. Try the "I want to buy your product but not this container or packaging" line. The movement, clean beauty, which seeks to responsibly source ingredients and sell them in recyclable/reusable containers is growing rapidly.

Squeezable bottles and tubes are impossible to clean and hard to recycle. Since many skin care products include a telephone number on the container, call that number and make a complaint. Finding sunscreen in a plastic-free container is especially challenging. Seek out the manufacturer of your favorite sunscreen and ask them for a better container.

Continue to talk to your friends and community. See if they can suggest substitutes and/or better products.

# Week 5

Micah 6: 8 *"What is required of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly..."*

## **Ordering Carryout Food, Eating in Restaurants & Traveling**

Ordering carryout can be a problem. Some restaurants are using fully biodegradable and compostable clamshells or other carryout containers made of molded fiber from plants such as corn, sugarcane, and bamboo. But many of these products are too expensive for restaurants with a high volume of take-out orders or located in suburban/rural areas.

Ask what type of containers the restaurant uses before placing a take-out order.

- If you don't like the response, consider a different restaurant or
- Ask if they will use a container(s) you provide.
- If you go ahead and place an order that entails styrofoam clamshells, register your concerns about plastic when you pick it up and encourage them to switch to eco-friendly containers.
- Politely decline any plastic utensils, seasonings packaged in plastic, and flimsy tote bags.

Put together a bag of reusable containers for leftovers and keep it in the car. Take your doggy-bag with you when you're going to eat in a restaurant. If you end up with leftovers, ask what carryout containers the restaurant uses. If possible, it's always better to use your own reusable containers.

When your stuff travels, avoid packing peanuts. Ask retailers to limit plastic when shipping goods to you and not to put plastic bags in another plastic bag.

Put together a travel kit – utensils, cloth napkins, plates, bowls, mugs or stainless-steel travel cups, salt & pepper, etc. Most of these items are available at Superfluity! Use them at hotels that offer breakfast served on single-use plastic (w/plastic utensils) or when you are dining at a supermarket.

Above all, avoid single use plastic bottles; always carry a reusable water bottle and/or a container for coffee/tea. If you can't fill a water bottle before boarding a plane, ask for water on the plane and hand your bottle to the service attendant with the top off.

Bring your own toiletries. Avoid travel sizes; stores sell small re-fillable containers. Look skeptically at the contents of mini-bars. Most contents come encased in plastic and provide single serving sizes.

## **Raise Your Voice**

Talk to the servers, supervisory staff, and owners at restaurants about the need to stop using plastic.

If you talk to someone during the travel reservation process, ask about the use of disposable plastic during the breakfast service, single-use toiletries, and mini-bar items.

Ask the same questions and express your concerns to servers, clerks and managers during your stay.

# Week 6

Mother Teresa *"I only feel angry when I see waste. When I see people throwing away things we could use."*

The Seattle Times 12/29/2019 "The fashion industry is the second largest consumer of water and is responsible for 8-10% of global carbon emission."

## Clothing

Try to buy clothes made of natural fibers – cotton, wool, silk, linen. Synthetic fabrics release microfiber pollution into the water when they're washed.

- Fleece from sheep and alpaca fleece are good natural fibers.
- Polar fleece is a toss-up – it's polyester (recycled plastic bottles) and contains microfibers.

Avoid cheap, poorly-made clothes in the fashion of the moment. They usually don't last very long, and they frequently can't be recycled or reused. The fashion industry thrives on cheap clothes.

- Look for durability and quality; plan to wear your clothes until they wear out.
- Look for second hand clothes to buy; take clothes you can no longer wear and are in good condition to second hand shops. Used clothes are no longer being shipped to India and used for making blankets – Chinese mills now manufacture blankets more cheaply.

Be careful when buying shoes - 50% of the shoes we wear are made from rubber and polyester

- Adidas expects to replace all of the virgin polyester in its Parley collection of shoes with recycled plastic bottles from our oceans by 2024; its jerseys are also made from ocean plastic.

Buy laundry detergent for washing your clothes in boxes instead of plastic bottles. Cardboard boxes are easier to recycle.

- Unilever 7<sup>th</sup> Generation has paper bottles for detergent.
- Costco, Target, Walgreens, etc. sell Tide Purclean Liquid – the container is compostable; it's a plant-based liquid; and it's a formula made with 100% renewable wind power electricity.

Whether it's clothing or groceries you're buying, remember to carry a re-usable bag when shopping.

## Raise Your Voice

In the store, request zero plastic packaging.

If you are shopping online, ask the retailer to reduce/remove plastic.

Ask Amazon for a commitment to stop using plastic on and inside their shipping containers.

**If Amazon makes big changes, other retailers will follow their lead.** Calling Amazon Customer Service @ 1-888-280-4331 now and regularly is an important way to raise your voice:

"Dear Amazon, I often want your wares, but not encased in plastic. I can also patiently wait for my order to arrive in only 1 box."

# Week 7

Church Covenant *“To live responsibly within your creation sharing with gratitude the gifts we are given.”*

Look back at what you have accomplished. Celebrate the changes you’ve made, and write down other things you’re committed to changing. Also, resolve to be more observant of additional things that could/should be changed and more intentional in your purchases.

Make a short list of things you haven’t been able to modify yet. Consumer demand normally means that new products are constantly coming into the market. But people are also demanding that plastics be replaced with non-fossil fuel and more environmentally-friendly products. Manufacturers and retailers are increasingly responsive. Consequently, some of your issues may be much easier to resolve six months from now.

Above all, continue to raise your voice. As indicated above, manufacturers and merchants are listening and responding.

Margaret Mead (cultural anthropologist, 1901-1978) *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that has.”*

## Plastics Calendar – Resources List

On-Ground Stores with Products to Replace Plastics. These stores allow you to re-fill existing containers and eliminate shipping.

- Recology Stores – Knowledgeable staff; browsing is fine; no pressure to buy

22833 Bothell-Everett Hwy #111	Bothell	425-398-8612
15858 First Avenue S. #A100	Burien	206-246-5669
317 NW Gilman Blvd #22	Issaquah	425-392-0285
15235 Aurora Ave. N. Ste 102	Shoreline	206-417-3877

- Public Goods & Services – Extensive re-fill inventory of cleaning and beauty products

3836 California Ave SW	Seattle	<a href="https://apublicshop.com">https://apublicshop.com</a>
Wed-Fri 11am – 6 pm	Sat/Sun 10 am – 5 pm	Mon/Tues – Closed

### On-Line Stores

- My Plastic Free Life – [www.plasticfreelife.com](http://www.plasticfreelife.com)

In addition to products for sale, site contains lots of useful information.

Under “Get Started,” click on “My100steps”

Scroll down to “Plastic Bags” for a link on storing fruits and vegetables without plastic.

- Life without plastic – [www.lifewithoutplastic.com](http://www.lifewithoutplastic.com)
- Personal Care Products Humankind – <https://byhumankind.com>

Plastic free shampoo and conditioner bars and refillable deodorant containers.

- Google “zero waste clean beauty” for a variety of other sites.

### Plastic Recycling

- [www.plasticfilmrecycling.org](http://www.plasticfilmrecycling.org) – great resource! See the website for types of plastic bags and drop-off locations

Sample Letter to reach out to organizations to stop selling products packaged in single use plastics.

- Beyond Plastics – [www.beyondplastics.org](http://www.beyondplastics.org)

Click on “Take Action” at top of page.

Under “Tools you can use” click on “Ask your store”

Ridwell [www.ridwell.com](http://www.ridwell.com) For a fee, Ridwell collects from your home plastics, batteries, light bulbs, clothes and shoes and more. All items are recycled and kept out of the landfill.