**1500 word limit**

**[OVT-xxx] On Becoming Free from Plastic Pollution**

**Source:** Presbytery

**Event:** 226th General Assembly (2024)

**Sponsor:** Presbytery of _____

# Recommendation

On Becoming Free from Plastic Pollution

*The Presbytery of _____ overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* to commit ourselves as a church, a people of faith and a social organization embodying Christian values, to:

1. Encourage all our settings to commit to changing from a disposable culture to a reusable, sustainable one.
2. 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, and
3. Encourage all settings of the Church to determine the best pathway forward for strategies and actions to mitigate plastic pollution, using as examples the following resources:
    a. The Story of Plastics, (95-minute documentary)[i]
    b. Sierra Club Solutions to Plastic Pandemic[ii]
    c. Ten Towns –Ten actions Toolkit of New Hampshire[iii]
    d. National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF): Join the Fight for Reducing Plastic Pollution[iv]
    e. Break Free Plastics: resources, articles, list of the worst corporate polluters and suggestions for actions[v]
    f. The Five Actions Congregations Can Take from the United Church of Christ[vi]
    g. Presbyterians for Earthcare webinar and resources on becoming free from plastics[vii]
4. Reduce the use of single-use plastics and packaging.
5. Commend all settings of the church to join in possible opportunities for participation in addressing plastic pollution including to:
    a. Encourage all settings of the Church to commit to change from the throwaway and disposable culture and consumptive practices to reusable and compostable products.[viii]
    b. Encourage replacement of single use plastics such as cutlery, plates, cups, straws, lids, and bottles with bioplastics, reusable, truly recyclable (like aluminum or paper) or compostable substitutes.
    c. Preach on ecological sustainability principles articulated by Sallie McFague on responsible use of ecological resources[ix] and the sustainable goal of mitigating single-use plastics.
    d. Educate on the importance of mitigation of single-use plastics and plastic straws as well as plastic bottles at our churches, their events, and gatherings.

e. Educate on the toxicity of plastic pollutions and microplastics to the health of our environment, to our own health, and the health of non-human life.
f. Educate on policies and practices of local recycling and composting services and advocating for better practices.
g. Organize low or zero waste events in collaboration with local organizations and infrastructures.
h. Support businesses that use sustainable practices such as reusable containers and reusable bags.
i. Participate in public cleanup of God's creation, including all bodies of water, parks, and beaches.[x]
j. Install fountains for water bottles in church campuses, wherever possible.
k. Actively support and lobby for local, state, national, and international legislation and policies that align with the intention of this resolution including bans of or fees on single use plastics.
l. Encourage the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee of the PC(USA) to engage with companies and corporations to reduce their production and use of plastics, particularly eliminating single-use plastics wherever possible.

6. Acknowledge that accommodations in expectations need to be made for certain impacted groups such as those who are disabled or unhoused.
7. Encourage people in all settings to speak truth to the public square against plastic pollution of our planet.

# Rationale

The 222nd General Assembly overwhelmingly agreed that "caring for God's creation" should be part of our constitution and this received concurrence of 150 Presbyteries[xi]. Our Book of Order now states "God sends the Church to share in the stewardship of creation, preserving the goodness and glory of the earth God has made"[xii] and includes "caring for God's Creation" in the commitment to participate in Christ's mission. In keeping with this, all Presbyterians should seek to reduce the use of plastics, especially single-use plastics, in their homes, churches, workplaces, communities, states and nation.

In 2023, our sisters and brothers in the United Church of Christ (UCC) General Synod passed the overture "Free from Plastic Pollution: A Resolution of Witness".[xiii] We overture the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to join them. The UCC's Rationale can be found in their Resolution.

The PC(USA) General Assembly has affirmed that creation care is a fundamental part of who we are as Presbyterians. The biblical mandate for the overture **"**On Amending G-1.0304, The Ministry of Members, by Adding "Caring for God's Creation"[xiv] by Dr. William P. Brown (William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary) applies to our need to become free from plastic pollution as well:

> *The fundamental biblical mandate for creation care comes from Genesis 2:15, where God places Adam in the garden to "till it and keep it" (NRSV). A better translation from the Hebrew is "to serve it and to preserve it." In Genesis 1:26–28, God blesses humankind with dominion over the earth. Human "dominion" as intended in Genesis is best practiced in care for creation.*

*In Christ "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17), and "every creature under heaven" is to receive God's good news (v. 23). According to Revelation, God's work in the world is "make all things new" (21:5), to bring about a new creation that does not destroy the old but transforms it, renews it. If the church is the sign of the new creation, then the church must lead the way in caring for creation.*

Since the UCC General Synod passed their Resolution of Witness, further evidence of the danger of plastics to God's Creation have been realized. Studies have found plastics in almost every food they tested, often at high levels.[xv] Water from disposable water bottles contains about 240,000 nanoparticles per liter.[xvi] Plastics in our bodies can have serious impacts on our health and inhaled plastics have been correlated with lung inflammation, shortness of breath and a higher risk of lung cancer.[xvii] These impacts disproportionately fall on vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Mary Johnson (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health) said, "Vulnerable populations are at even greater risk of the negative health impacts from the production, use and degradation of plastics".[xviii]

Approximately 99 percent of plastic comes from fossil fuels, generating 3.4% of global greenhouse gas emissions.[xviii] Petrochemical companies have undertaken a massive increase in plastic production referred to as "Plan B for the fossil fuel industry".[xviii] Expanded the use of plastics serves to increase demand for fracked gas.[xix] Leaked methane, the largest component of fracked gas, has 28 times as much impact on warming the climate as does carbon dioxide[xx] and is responsible for about 30% of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution,[xxi] resulting in 2023 being the warmest year on record, by far.[xxii] And while governments and international bodies are trying to limit plastic production, petrochemical industries are working to weaken legislation and international treaties.

Currently, 430 million tons of plastic is produced *yearly* resulting in a production of 11 billion metric tons of plastic in the last century, surpassing the biomass of all animals on earth. Despite efforts to convince people recycling is effective, only 9% of the plastic ever produced has been recycled, and 19% has been incinerated.[xxiv] Plastics are now one of the largest environmental disasters on our planet, polluting the Earth we are passing on to our children and subsequent generations.

God placed Adam in the garden to serve it and to preserve it. It is time for the Presbyterian Church (USA) to preserve creation by becoming free from plastic pollution.

---

[i] The Story of Stuff, https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-plastic-documentary-film/how-towatch/

[ii] Resources on Plastic Pollution Solutions, Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/zero-waste/story-of-plastic

[iii] Ten Towns Toolkit, https://www.10towns.org/

[iv] National Environmental Education Foundation, https://www.neefusa.org/nature/water/join-fight-reduce-plastic-pollution

[v] #BreakFreeFromPlastic, https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/

[vi] Free from Plastic Pollution: Five Actions Congregations Can Take, United Church of Christ, 2023 https://www.ucc.org/free-from-plastic-pollution-five-resolution-resources/

[vii] Resources for Webinar Free from Plastic Pollution: A United Church of Christ Resolution of Witness, 2023, https://presbyearthcare.org/free-from-plastic-pollution/

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

[ix] McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*

[x] Greenpeace, https://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaign/toolkit-plasticfree-future/
[xi] Minutes of the General Assembly 2016, Presbyterian Church (USA), https://www.pcusa.org/resource/minutes-general-assembly-2016/
[xii] Book of Order 2023-2025, Presbyterian Church (USA), https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boo_2023-2023_publishedversion_cover_and_boo_complete.pdf, *W-5.0305* pp. 133-134
[xiii] Free from Plastic Pollution: Five Actions Congregations Can Take, United Church of Christ, 2023, https://www.ucc.org/free-from-plastic-pollution-five-resolution-resources/
[xiv] On Amending G-1.0304, "The Ministry of Members," by Adding "Caring for God's Creation"—From the Presbytery of New Castle. https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/6285

[xv] The Plastic Chemicals Hiding in Your Food, Consumer Reports, 2024, https://www.consumerreports.org/health/food-contaminants/the-plastic-chemicals-hiding-in-your-food-a7358224781/

[xvi] Rapid single-particle chemical imaging of nanoplastics by SRS microscopy, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, 2024, https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2300582121
[xvii] Microplastics Are Everywhere. What Are They Doing to Our Health? Discover Magazine, 2023, https://www.discovermagazine.com/environment/microplastics-are-everywhere-what-are-they-doing-to-our-health
[xviii] How the fossil fuel industry is pushing plastics on the world, CNBC, 2022, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/29/how-the-fossil-fuel-industry-is-pushing-plastics-on-the-world-.html
[xix] Ibid.
[xx] Overview of Greenhouse Gases, US Environmental Protection Agency, https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases
[xxi] Global Methane Tracker 2023, International Energy Agency, https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2023
[xxii] 2023 was the world's warmest year on record, by far, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2024, https://www.noaa.gov/news/2023-was-worlds-warmest-year-on-record-by-far
[xxiii] Fossil-Fuel Interests Try to Weaken Global Plastics Treaty, Scientific American, 2023, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fossil-fuel-interests-try-to-weaken-global-plastics-treaty/
[xxiv] Think that your plastic is being recycled? Think again. MIT Technology Review, 2023, https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/10/12/1081129/plastic-recycling-climate-change-microplastics/#:~:text=Only%209%25%20of%20the%20plastic,and%2019%25%20has%20been%20incinerated