

Laudato Si'



Promoting an integral ecology in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet

WRITTEN BY THE LAUDATO SI' COMMITTEE

Lenten Challenge 2024 Weekly Thoughts & Alternatives to Plastics

Introduction

On Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten journey, a time for prayer, reflection, and an opportunity to change habits that are not life-giving. During this Lent, the Diocesan Laudato Si' Committee will share facts about plastic pollution and offer suggestions for living more plastic free. By changing old habits, we can protect our common home.

Plastic is everywhere; in our clothes, our phones, our food, and in immense floating garbage patches in the oceans. Living plastic free seems overwhelming. A.J. Jacobs humorously writes in an NYT article, "[Trying to Live a Day Without Plastic](#)," about his 24-hour experiment to go plastic-free:

"On the morning of the day I had decided to go without using plastic products — or even touching plastic — I opened my eyes and put my bare feet on the carpet. Which is made of nylon, a type of plastic. I was roughly 10 seconds into my experiment, and I had already committed a violation."

Although living plastic-free even for a day may be impossible, there are many ways to reduce plastic waste in our lives and in our homes that will make a positive impact on our environment.

Make your way through the weekly suggestions, finding examples that work for your lifestyle and budget.

Week One Reducing Personal Care Plastic Waste

Quiz Question

What happens to plastic waste when left in the environment?

- a) It is a biodegradable material, so it eventually disintegrates.
- b) It never fully goes away; it just breaks into little pieces.
- c) There is no such thing as plastic waste; all plastic is recycled.

Answer: B. A team studying plastic pollution in the ocean found that out of 66,077 pieces of plastic collected in samples, 95% of it was millimeters in size.

Alternatives for Reducing Personal Care Plastic Waste

1. Give up shampoo in plastic bottles. Switch to shampoo bars, which can be purchased in most places where personal care products are sold. Shampoo bars are essentially a bar of soap for your hair; these bars produce a great lather without using as much of the product as liquid shampoo.
2. Choose wooden combs. In addition to doing something good for the environment, wooden combs are more beneficial for your hair's health, and they reduce static while brushing!
3. Swap out your plastic toothbrush for a bamboo toothbrush with natural fibers. It is estimated that about one billion toothbrushes are thrown away each year in the US alone. Untreated bamboo is compostable, but even if you don't compost, the time it takes to decompose in a landfill is significantly lower.
4. Switch to silk dental floss. Most of the silk dental floss comes in plastic-free packaging, which doubles plastic waste reduction!
5. Baking soda is the best deodorant EVER. Instead of deodorant in a plastic container, use baking soda mixed with a few drops of tea tree oil applied to dry underarms with a reusable cotton round. It works better than commercial deodorants. Other options are cardboard sticks, glass jars, or deodorant bars.
6. Deodorant containers are a tricky item for recycling. They look like many other recyclable plastic items, but they aren't recyclable at all. Most areas won't accept them because they often contain more than one type of plastic. Plastics need to be recycled with the same type of plastic, so mixed plastic items that can't be separated on the conveyor belt, get sent to the landfill.

Video: [A Brief History of Plastic](#) – 5:38

Week Two

Reducing Plastic Waste When Shopping for, Preparing, Eating Food

Quiz Question

True or False: There are many alternatives to single use plastic products.

- a) True
- b) False

Answer: A. There are many alternatives to single use plastic products or even just plastic products. From reusable bags to stainless steel travel mugs, giving up plastic can be as simple as a single choice.

Alternatives for Reducing Plastic Waste When Shopping for, Preparing, and Eating Food:

1. Carry reusable shopping bags for your groceries, or even better, carry them for all your purchases, from electronics to clothing.
2. Use cotton produce bags. Every different vegetable or fruit you get at the store is usually packed in a separate plastic bag. People sometimes end up going home with 10-15 plastic bags after just one shopping trip. And the bags, sadly, will often simply end up in the trash bin without being reused again. There are many kinds of affordable and reusable bags made from 100% cotton mesh biodegradable material.
3. Give up bottled water and other plastic-bottled beverages. Carry a stainless-steel travel mug or water bottle.
4. Avoid straws or use metal or paper straws. There are many plastic straw alternatives, and many fast-food establishments have switched to paper straws as a disposable alternative.
5. Buy in bulk. To avoid food packaging, shop the bulk aisle at the market and bring your own glass containers. Weigh the jar beforehand to avoid being overcharged.

6. Buy wine with natural corks. Cork is an amazing renewable natural resource. There is no need to cut down trees to harvest it. There's no need for wine bottles to use plastic corks to add to plastic waste. If you're not sure which wines use real or plastic cork, there's an app for that. Otherwise, choose a wine with a screw off top instead.
7. Let go of frozen convenience foods. Most frozen food containers use plastic. Even frozen food trays that seem to be made of cardboard are lined with plastic. The more we limit our consumption of frozen convenience foods, the less plastic waste we'll generate and the healthier we'll be!

Video: [Would Banning Plastic Bottles Help or Hurt the Planet?](#) 7:34

Week Three

Reducing Plastics in Cleaning and Laundry Routines

Quiz Question

Which of the following are true about laundry routines?

- a) Laundry comes with a hefty environmental price tag.
- b) The simplest green solution is to wear clothes longer and do less laundry.
- c) Most detergents contain toxic ingredients.
- d) Front-loaders are nature-friendlier than top-loaders.
- e) Microfibers are tiny plastic particles that clothes shed during laundry.

Answer: All the above! a) Washing and drying machines consume a lot electricity, while toxic detergents are a potential threat to health and the environment. b) When you wash clothes, use cooler water, shorter cycles, and fuller loads. c) Avoid toxic detergents in plastic bottles and use natural, friendly, and green alternatives. d) Line-dry your clothes. e) Washing machines don't capture microfibers.

Alternatives for Reducing Plastics in Cleaning and Laundry Routines

1. Clean with vinegar and water. Try a mixture of 1 part vinegar to 3 parts water as an all-purpose spray cleaner. Be sure to store it in a reused spray bottle.
2. Use natural scrub sponges. Sponges are among the dirtiest items in the kitchen. People use them multiple times a day, but how often do they really clean them in boiling water or in a microwave to kill the bacteria? The solution might seem to be for sponges, which are mostly made from oil-based plastic, to be replaced frequently, which means a lot of trash. A better idea is to use sponges made from plants, which last longer and are 100% compostable.
3. Use dryer balls. You can get wool dryer balls everywhere. Not only do they dry your clothes faster, so you use less energy on your drying time, but they also replace your fabric softener. Just another big clunky plastic container you don't need to carry to the laundry! They last a long time, so you rarely need to replace them, especially compared to the many plastic bottles or plastic dryer sheets you would normally be using.
4. Get detergent in a box. Dishwashing has become an extremely plastic heavy market. Not only are most options coming out of a big plastic bottle, but the dissolvable pods are also made with plastic too. There are so many dangers to our ecosystem when microplastics end up in our water, and subsequently the food chain. Detergent pods (including both dishwasher and laundry pods) are not an eco-friendly solution. Switching to a cardboard container makes for a much easier recyclable packaging option that reduces plastic waste.

5. Avoid wet wipes. Wet wipes are a sneaky plastic. They look like a paper towel or a cloth, but they are made from a mix of plastics. On top of that, so many of them say they are flushable, but there is no plumber in the world who would agree that it is a good idea to flush them. Wet wipes cause a huge clogging problem when flushed. In addition, flushing these plastic items adds plastics to our groundwater. Switching from wet wipes and disinfectant wipes to towels and rags is a tiny adjustment but a doable one.

Video: [The Story of Plastic \(Animated Short\)](#) 4:15

Week Four

Reducing Plastic in Clothing

Quiz Question

Which of the following fabrics have some type of plastic in them?

- a) Rayon
- b) Nylon
- c) Cotton
- d) Polyester
- e) Non-iron t-shirts
- f) Mesh t-shirts
- g) Taffeta

Answer: Any response except C. When purchasing cotton fabrics, however, it is important to look at how much of the item is actually cotton, as well as where the item was made. Even if it were 100% cotton, beware of purchasing a piece of clothing from a country where labor practices are unethical. Shopping isn't as straightforward as it may once have been.

Plastic fabrics help put the stretch in skinny jeans and socks, give dress clothes their shimmer, keep outerwear lightweight and water-resistant and enable accessories to be molded into all sorts of funky shapes. From nylon, polyester and spandex to faux fur, rayon and even recycled plastics, the fashion world has embraced these plastic fabrics and taken design to heights. [Learn more about types of plastic fabric.](#)

Alternatives for Reducing Plastics in Clothing:

1. Choose clothing made of fabrics like cotton, linen, silk, and other natural fibers.
2. Shop at thrift or resale stores for clothing and other items.
3. Wear cassava ponchos on rainy days. Vinyl ponchos are more comfortable to wear on a rainy day than carrying an umbrella, but most of these ponchos will be thrown away after a few uses and will not decompose for millions of years. An ingenious man with a biology degree from Indonesia created ponchos, bags, and food packaging from cassava, a common vegetable found across the country.
4. Look for plastic-free shoes. Some shoe brands are made from natural rubber rather than plastic.
5. Alter and modify old clothes into new. Do you have old clothes and shoes in the closet that you never wear because they don't fit or are out of style? Take them to a tailor or cobbler for alteration if you are unable to alter them yourself.

Video: [The Story of Plastic: Where Your Recycled Plastic Ends Up](#) 4:15

Week Five

Strategies for Green Gift Giving

Quiz Question

Why is plastic dangerous for marine life?

- a) Marine animals mistake it for food and cannot digest it.
- b) Marine animals can get tangled in it which hinders their ability to swim.
- c) Bacteria on plastic can give coral diseases.
- d) All of the above

Answer: D. Plastics tends to float and bob on the surface; this leads marine animals to mistake them for food. Plastic bags are often mistaken for jellyfish by leatherback turtles and consumed. Marine life can also get tangled in nets, cords, and other plastic debris, which hinders their ability to swim and, in some cases, can be a severe choking hazard.

Alternative Strategies for Green Gift Giving

1. Gift natural toys to babies and children. Wooden and natural toys are a great way to avoid buying plastic. Babies put toys in their mouths, so a wooden toy rather than a plastic one is a healthier option. The next baby shower or kids' birthday party that you buy for, buy natural.
2. Give experiences or services (like restaurant meals, tickets to events, your help with a task) over stuff.
3. Consider giving charitable gifts but choose wisely and plastic-free.
4. Request plastic-free gifts for yourself. It can be challenging to ask friends and family not to give you new plastic, but it can be done in a kind way. If you don't need any new things, request a donation to your favorite charity.
5. Find ways to wrap gifts without plastic tape. Reusing gift bags, reusing wrapping paper, and wrapping presents in reusable cloth bags or furoshiki are the best options.

Video: [What really happens to the plastic you throw away - Emma Bryce](#) 4:06

Week Six

Reducing Plastic Pollution by Changing the System

Quiz Question

How many million tons of plastic are dumped in our oceans every year?

- a) 1 million tons
- b) 8 million tons
- c) 20 million tons
- d) 50 million tons

Answer: B. At least 8 million tons of plastic is dumped into our oceans each year; this is equivalent to dumping one garbage truck full of plastic into the ocean every minute. If nothing is done, this will increase to two garbage trucks a minute by 2030 and four per minute by 2050!

Alternatives to Reduce Plastic on a Large Scale by Changing the System

1. To change the system, you need to inform yourself about plastics, plastic waste, and the harmful effects of plastics on humans and the environment. There are numerous resources. Here is just one resource: [Top 10 FAQs About Plastic](#)
2. Recycle “good” plastics. Clear plastic bottles, bottles for shampoos, yogurt containers, toys and reusable food containers have a higher probability of being recycled. Disposable cutlery, cling wrap and coffee cups and lids have very low probability.
3. Act now to save our common home by putting the Climate Action Now App on your phone. Here is how it works: The Climate Action Now App makes it exceptionally easy to take meaningful climate action on your phone in just seconds or minutes. Most actions you take earn points, and when you’ve earned enough points, we’ll plant a tree on your behalf.
4. To learn how to download the free app to your phone and to watch a 3-minute video on Climate Action Now, please click this link: <https://climateactionnow.com/>
5. Sign the petition to eliminate plastic in these stores: <https://go.acespace.org/page/104097/petition/1?locale=en-US>

Video: [How microplastics affect your health - YouTube](#) 1:56

Questions or want to learn more? Visit dijoliet.org/laudato-si.