



Healing Our Throwaway Culture:
Focus on Plastics

Healing Our Throwaway Culture: *A Focus on Plastics*

Introduction for Facilitator

Thank you for stepping up and agreeing to lead this Earth Day program! As an event host/facilitator for the 2024 Earth Day program, your efforts are extremely important in building a movement of Catholics working together to care for our common home.

PROGRAM DETAILS

This program guide contains everything you need to host/lead an Earth Day event. In this hour-long program, your community will have an opportunity to pray, learn, discuss, and discern how to take concrete actions on the plastics crisis as individuals and as a group.

This program may be used by a parish, school, youth group, university, religious community, or other group that is interested in exploring how we, as Catholics, can work to fix the plastics crisis. It is also a great program for delving more deeply into several of the [Laudato Si' Action Platform's \(LSAP\) goals](#). If your group is interested in forming (or registering) a [Creation Care Team](#) with Catholic Climate Covenant, please check out the great resources and assistance that we can offer you.

This program is designed as an in-person event. However, we provide guidance for hosting an online/virtual event as well.

WHAT IS EARTH DAY?

Earth Day is a secular celebration that many faith communities have incorporated into their annual calendars for environmental awareness and action. Monday, April 22, 2024, marks the 54th anniversary of Earth Day. This year, the secular Earth Day ([EarthDay.org](#)) organization's theme is [Planet vs. Plastics](#). Earthday.org is working toward a 60 percent reduction in the production of plastics by 2030. Catholic Climate Covenant's 2024 Earth Day program is designed to activate the U.S. Catholic community to take complementary action, reducing plastic pollution and its impacts on our common home.

The Covenant's program can also be used during Laudato Si' Week (an eight-day campaign held annually in May to mark the anniversary of Pope Francis's encyclical on creation care) or anytime throughout the year and beyond that fits your community's schedule.

LIST YOUR EVENT: You are invited to list your Earth Day events on EarthDay.org's [events site](#). We encourage you to do so, and let the world know that the U.S. Catholic community is doing something about the plastic crisis. You can also list your event on the "We Are All Part of God's Plan(et)" campaign website [www.GodsPlanet.us](#).

If you have questions about this program, please contact info@catholicclimatecovenant.org.

PLANNING FOR YOUR EVENT

As the event facilitator, you have a few responsibilities to ensure the event runs smoothly, but feel free to share responsibilities with others in your community! This is YOUR program. If you feel that you would like to adapt it to your group's particular needs, please do so. As a facilitator, it is your job to:

Set a date and time

Though designed to commemorate the 54th anniversary of Earth Day (Monday, April 22nd), feel free to schedule the program at a time that is convenient for your parish, school, or religious community. This program is designed to last approximately one hour, but you can schedule extra time if you'd like to give participants more flexibility for discussion. You can also shorten the program by skipping the small group discussion and/or the suggested advocacy activity.

Find a location

If you are planning an in-person event, you will need to find a location. Ask the appropriate authority (your pastor, parish council, or school principal) if you can use their facility as your event location. If that space is not available, try your local library, recreation center, or civic center. Make sure the location is accessible to all, has internet access, and enough chairs for everyone.

If you are planning an online meeting, you will need access to an online meeting system (such as Zoom or Google Meet). You can also send the individual program link to people in your community so they can participate in the program at home, which helps increase actions. You can also meet online after your in-person event to discuss how your community can start working on the suggested community commitments highlighted during the event.

Invite people

Make sure your parish or other organization knows about the event and publicize it as far in advance and as often as you can. Ask your parish administrator or school/office staff to advertise it in a newsletter or bulletin. You can also send out emails, electronic invites, text messages, Facebook messages and posts on other social media, as well as making fliers and calls. (See [promotion folder](#) with flier and suggested social media graphics.)

Keep the event on schedule

Suggested lengths of time for each section of the program are included. Feel free to extend (or shorten) the program to fit your community's needs. Set an alarm on your phone or watch to ensure that the group's time is respected.

Prepare materials for the group activity:

1. Make copies of the [Participant Program](#). If meeting in person, you will need sufficient printed copies of the Participant Program, as well as paper and pens/pencils.
2. If the program is virtual/online, make sure you send the participants a copy of the Participant Program via email prior to the event and ask that they have paper/pens available.
3. Internet service: The event includes a short video which can be [downloaded](#). It can also be watched directly on [YouTube](#) if you have internet access at the event location.
4. Computer and projector: If the program is in person, you'll need a computer, video cords, and a projector to show the video. Generally, computer speakers alone are not loud enough, so you should bring a portable speaker to amplify the sound that accompanies the video.
5. For the suggested action (signing the petition calling for strong U.S. government support of the UN Plastic Treaty), consider having some extra laptops open to the [advocacy action page](#). We've also provided a QR code for participants to access the petition with their smartphones.
6. If you decide to use the program virtually (on an online platform), you will need access to an online meeting platform account (such as Zoom).
7. Choose volunteers to help with the various readings (there are 5 readings).

Let's Get Started

2024 PROGRAM GUIDE

A reminder: This is the **facilitator version** of the program guide (with facilitator notes and script). Your facilitator instructions are in **blue**, and the script (what you will read) is in *italics*.

Make sure everyone has a copy of the program, some paper, and a pen/pencil.

Welcome and opening Prayer (5 MINUTES)

Script: *Over the past 50 years, world plastic production has doubled. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that the production of plastic products accounts for a 4-8 percent of global oil production. A 2023 report from Pacific Environment called for a 75 percent reduction in plastic production by 2050 to avoid a disastrous increase in global temperatures. We must deal with the plastic crisis if we are to control the climate crisis, to improve the health of our air and oceans, and to protect the earth's biodiversity and human health. In this Earth Day program, we will focus on the plastics crisis, its impacts, and how we are called to respond and heal what Pope Francis calls "our throwaway culture."*

We begin with prayer. Please join me.

OPENING PRAYER

LEADER: *Today, we face a creation longing to both be healed and be praised!*

All: We gather today to praise God.

L: *Our earth is precious and is in need of gentleness and kindness as we face pollution and climate change.*

All: We pray for all of creation: the sky, land, sea, and all living creatures.

L: *We pray that God grants us the wisdom and ability to protect all our brothers and sisters, and all ecosystems and natural habitats, freeing them from harm and inhumane actions.*

All: We will protect the earth from plastic pollution, keeping the earth in God's loving care.

L: *We are created for relationships: with God, with one another, and with the earth.*

All: Let us honor those relationships today and every day.

L: *We seek to care for our common home, the earth, to heal rather than wound, to treasure rather than discard.*

All: Let us understand that all creation is connected and in need of healing.

L: *God of providence, transform us, that we may place the welfare of our common home and your people before our fleeting desires.*

All: Grant us divine wisdom and embolden us to replace systems of destruction and wasteful consumption with systems of justice and sustainability.

L: *May we commit to new ways of honoring God's creation as a means of sharing Jesus' transforming Love.*

All: And let us seek God's grace, justice, and mercy for all.

~Prayer adapted from Season of Creation Morning Prayer, "A Culture of Relationships That Heals Our Throwaway Culture" (World Council of Churches), and Plastic Free July Prayer (St. Columban Mission Society)

Script: *Let us focus our attention on the plastics crisis and why it is such a critical environmental and health issue.*

Video (6 MINUTES)

You can watch directly on [YouTube](#) or [download](#) the video to your computer.

Readings (10 MINUTES)

Script: *Let us now consider the theological richness of our Scripture and tradition, and how they can help us frame the issue of plastics and find concrete solutions to the plastic crisis. After each reading, we will pause for about two minutes to give you time to silently reflect on the questions that are below each reading.*

READING #1

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves.

~Romans 8:19-23 (NRSV-CE)

Silent Reflection (Feel free to jot down your thoughts/ ideas on paper)

In linking the video and this reading from Romans 8:19-23, consider the following:

- How does the plastics crisis manifest a “throwaway culture?”
- How has humanity subjected creation to futility?
- When thinking of the plastics crisis, how are you called to set creation free from its bondage?

READING #2:

It is how (St.) Francis lived in Christ that shaped his relationship to creation. Penance, poverty, humility, and compassion were the values that forged Francis into a “cosmic brother,” one who was related to all creatures and to the elements of creation. Through penance he recognized his sinfulness and need for conversion. Through poverty he became aware of the human tendency to possess, as he realized his radical dependency on all things. Through humility, he realized his solidarity with all creatures. Through compassion, he came to have deep feelings for the things of the earth, including the tiniest of creatures.

~Ilia Delio OSF, [A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World](#)

Silent Reflection (Feel free to jot down your thoughts/ ideas on paper)

The plastics crisis is a manifestation of what Pope Francis calls “our throwaway society” or “culture of waste.” How do St. Francis’ values of “penance, poverty, humility, and compassion” speak to you as you try to live faithfully in Christ, in the midst of this culture of waste?

READING #3

There is need for an effective cooperation between men and women of goodwill in assisting the ongoing work of the Creator...We cannot allow our seas and oceans to be littered by endless fields of floating plastic. Here too, our active commitment is needed to confront this emergency. We need to pray as if everything depended on God's providence and work as if everything depended on us.

~Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, September 1, 2018

I would like us all to make a serious commitment to respect and protect creation, to be attentive to every person, to counter the culture of waste and disposable, to promote a culture of solidarity and of encounter.

~Pope Francis. General Audience June 5th, 2013

Silent Reflection (Feel free to jot down your thoughts/ ideas on paper)

Silently re-read Pope Francis' statements above.

1. How are you called to "assist the ongoing work of the creator?"
2. How could you act "to counter and heal the culture of waste?"
3. How could you act to "promote a culture of solidarity and encounter?"

Small Group Discussion and Commitment (30 MINUTES)

Script: Please divide into groups of 3-5 people. You will have 30 minutes to discuss the questions below and choose personal and community commitment(s). **If meeting virtually, we suggest using breakout rooms and saying:** We will now move to breakout rooms. Your group will have 30 minutes to discuss the questions below and choose personal and community commitment(s).

1. Where have you personally seen the impact of plastics in your community and/or in your life?
2. How is the plastic crisis a symptom of our "throwaway culture?"
3. How are the impacts of plastic production and pollution a justice issue? How are they a pro-life issue?
4. How are we, as Catholics, called to counter the "culture of waste and disposables," to "promote a culture of solidarity and encounter," and to heal the plastic crisis? Think back to the actions you jotted down earlier!
5. Make a personal and community commitment(s):
Look at Commitments Handout at the end of the program (Side 1 lists possible personal commitments, and Side 2 lists possible community commitments. The lists are not exhaustive. If you have an idea that is not on the lists, share it!)
 - What will you commit yourself to doing, and what will you work with your community to do?
 - Write your commitment(s) on the piece of paper your facilitator handed you.
 - Share your commitments with your small group.

Act (10 MINUTES)

Script: As we learned in the video, the issue of plastics cannot be solved solely with individual actions. Systemic change is needed. Let us learn about a systemic action that is currently unfolding and how we can make an impact.

READER #1:

In Nov. 2023, negotiators from 170 nations agreed on a draft of The UN Plastic Treaty, which aims to be the first-ever international, legally binding treaty on plastic pollution. The world will come together again in Ottawa this April for further negotiations to continue developing the final text of the treaty by the end of 2024. The draft treaty text was pushed through by the global south and island nations, who are disproportionately impacted by plastics pollution. But the treaty still faces many obstacles. Debate centers on how the treaty will impact waste workers and how quickly we can reduce plastic production.

READER #2

We must join together to insist that the U.S. government:

1. Supports a strong UN Plastic Treaty with mandatory, ambitious, scientifically based, and enforceable control measures and obligations to ensure results and accountability.
2. Puts environmental justice concerns at the center of the negotiations of the UN Plastic Treaty.
3. Prioritizes the reduction of plastic production, with a rapid phase-out of the most harmful plastics and additives (such as microplastics).
4. Reduces plastic production by ceasing to permit new or expanded facilities and infrastructure.
5. Ensures solutions to plastic production, pollution, and waste management are science-based, as well as environmentally just and sound.
6. Guarantees a just transition for waste collection and plastic manufacturing workers.

Have a couple of extra laptops open to this page: Invite people to add their names to the petition using the laptops or the QR code via their smartphones. If online, give people time to access the link on their computers.

Script: Add your name today to tell the U.S. government to adopt an ambitious, human health and justice-centered stance during the UN Global Treaty negotiations. You can use your smartphone to access the petition or the laptops we have available.



SIGN YOUR NAME HERE

(For more background on the asks to the U.S. government, see [Plastic Pollution Coalition's letter to U.S. Government](#))

Closing Prayer (3 MINUTES)

Script: Thank you for being part of this Earth Day 2024 program. We hope you leave here today with a commitment to healing our throwaway culture by reducing your personal use of plastics and taking action for systemic changes. I'd like to thank everyone for coming and being such wonderful participants in this program. We will now close with a short prayer.

All: (Sign of the cross) In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

LEADER: Creator God

Thank you for the many good gifts you have given us – so much beauty and abundance in creation all around us.

All: The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

L: *And yet we hear creation groaning and we have heavy hearts because we know so much of creation's pain is due to our actions. Forgive us for polluting the environment through our selfish deeds, without considering the impacts on people and creation.*

All: The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

L: *Help us fulfill Jesus' call to love our neighbors and take action to look out for one another. We remember the people on the frontline of plastic pollution. We pray to you, Lord, that you protect them from the diseases and flooding that come with plastic pollution and that they may find comfort in you.*

All: The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

L: *We pray that world leaders would act on plastic pollution, coming together to agree on an ambitious and binding plastics treaty. Give wisdom and soft hearts to those involved in the negotiations. We pray for each of the 20 million waste pickers around the world who do vital work. They collect plastics for recycling, and yet are often overlooked and underpaid. Let their voices be listened to at the UN treaty negotiations and their human rights and livelihoods protected. Oh, God, help us not to throw this opportunity away.*

All: The earth is yours, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

L: *Dear God, we pray for the global church, for all the communities and people affected by plastic pollution, that you may keep them close to you. Help us to restore and care for this beautiful earth you blessed us with. Amen!*

~Jessica Bwali from Zambia (Tearfund - used and adapted with permission)



For more information: info@catholicclimatecovenant.org

Join the Laudato Si' Action Platform Journey

Are you inspired to do more to heal our common home? The *We're All Part of God's Plan(et)* is a national Laudato Si' awareness and engagement campaign to educate and inspire U.S. Catholics to more fully embrace and act on the teachings of Laudato Si'. This campaign especially encourages Catholics — from families to parishes and from universities to religious communities and businesses — to participate in the Vatican's global Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP). The LSAP is an excellent tool to assist your personal, family's, or community's creation care activities. Enroll in the LSAP today and let Godsplanet.us accompany you in your journey to sustainability.



Healing Our Throwaway Culture: A Focus on Plastics

Commitments Handout

Take this list home and consider what further action/commitments you can take on a personal and community level.

Make a personal commitment

If you'd like to reduce your personal consumption of plastics, here are a few suggestions:

1. The first and foremost question in the spirit of Franciscan simplicity of living and poverty of possessions is, "Do I really need this product?" Be aware of personal WANTS versus NEEDS. Stop buying things you don't really need!
2. Purchasing decisions that reduce plastics:
 - Buy fruit and vegetables not packaged in plastic. Consider buying from local greengrocers or farmers' markets instead of supermarkets, and take your own fabric shopping bag.
 - Aim to purchase things in glass jars and bottles instead of plastic containers — i.e.: drinks, jams, spreads, vitamins, etc.
 - Think about buying bars of soap/shampoo — instead of plastic pump bottles. Purchase detergents in cardboard boxes.
 - Don't buy bottled water. Get a reusable steel water bottle and fill it from the tap.
 - Say no to single-use plastic, such as drinking straws, knives and forks, and plastic-lined drink cups.
 - Use loose tea leaves — most tea bags are sealed with plastic.
 - Refuse styrofoam food and drink containers. Urge your local municipality to ban them.
3. Replace plastic Tupperware with glass or steel containers and replace cling-film with Beeswax Wrap.
4. Reuse and give plastic packaging a new purpose. If you must buy a plastic bottle or a plastic container, reuse it instead of throwing it away.
5. Recycle plastics correctly. Look at the labels: #1 and #2 plastics are almost always recyclable, while #6 plastics aren't always accepted. Check with your local municipality to see what is locally accepted for recycling.
6. Share the [Plastic Pollution Treaty Petition](#) with friends, family, and community members.
7. Participate as an individual (and/or family) in [Plastic Free July](#).



Make a community commitment (parish, school, religious order, diocese, city, etc.)

If you would like your parish, school, religious order, organization, or city/municipality to reduce the consumption of plastics, here are a few suggestions:

1. Conduct a plastic audit (PlasticFreeJuly.com) to find out how much plastic you are throwing away.
2. Pledge to remove all single-use plastics from your parish, school, or religious community facilities by a certain date. Think about alternatives to plastic dinnerware (cups, plates, knives, spoons, and forks) and disposable plastic bottles. Find biodegradable or reusable/washable substitutes.
3. Install a water filter so people can refill their reusable water bottles.
4. Coffee cups: If your church, school, or organization serves coffee, encourage everyone to start bringing their own non-disposable cups. Have a “mug drive” and encourage everyone to donate one of their extras. Setting out the mugs on the table next to the coffee pot is an excellent way to reduce paper and plastic waste.
5. Plan a beach, stream, or park cleanup.
6. Refuse styrofoam/polystyrene food and drink containers.
7. Become a zero-waste church, school, or community! Check out ZeroWasteChurch.org for ideas and inspiration.
8. Watch EcoSpirit's (St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community in Minneapolis, MN) [zero-waste event video](#) to learn how one Catholic parish has stepped up and is responding to the need to heal our throwaway culture.
9. Participate as a community (parish, school, religious community, etc.) in [Plastic Free July](#).
10. Share the [Plastic Pollution Treaty Petition](#) with friends, family, and community members.

The lists come from Franciscan Seculars' [Plastic-Free Lent 2018 program](#)
and Catholic Climate Covenant's [Earth Day 2018 Program](#)

To access the Commitments Handout online
(and all of the links on it) go to bit.ly/ed24handout.

