

Item 09-02. On the Use of Non-Disposable Food Service Items-From the Presbytery of Heartland.

Recommendation

[The assembly approved Item 09-02.]

On the Use of Non-Disposable Food Service Items—From the Presbytery of Heartland.

The Presbytery of Heartland overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to direct the General Assembly to request Presbyterian congregations and individual members to highly encourage the use of non-disposable food service items, and to refrain from the use of disposable food service products, particularly styrofoam and other non-biodegradables; to use non-disposable bags for packing items purchased in the commercial market, and to refrain from using plastic bags; to choose tap or home or church-filtered water instead of bottled water or soda, and to refrain from purchasing those liquids in plastic bottles. Even though this represents only a part of what we can do to live in a more environmentally just manner, it is extremely important in beginning to live sustainable, healthy lives.

Rationale

Reaffirm the statements of the 183rd, 187th, 192nd, 193rd, 195th, 196th, 199th, 201st, 202nd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 208th, 210th, 211th, 213th, 215, and 216th General Assemblies (1971, 1975, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006) reflecting the determination of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that protection of the environment is an essential part of the Christian faith.

In Isaiah 6:3 the Seraphs “called to [one] another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of [God’s] glory.’” According to Isaiah, the visible presence of God is pulsing through creation, as Creator, Christ, and Spirit. We worship in this sanctuary called earth.

The *Book of Order* (W-7.5001a) states that “God calls the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in God’ work of creation and preservation.” In (W-7.5003), it reminds us that we are “stewards of God’s creation who hold the earth in trust”

The 217th General Assembly (2006) strongly urged all Presbyterians to live carbon neutral lives and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing our energy usage. This included reduction of emissions in transportation, food production, packaging, and shipment. It noted that “the urgency, injustice, and seriousness of this issue calls us as Christians to act NOW and to act boldly to lead the way in reducing our energy usage” ([*Minutes*, 2006, Part I, p. 896](#)).

The urgency is also reflected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a group of 2,500 scientists. They have discovered that what we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. Their latest findings show “much stronger trends in climate change than previously thought,” and that if the world does not act quickly to reverse current trends, the results will be disastrous.

It has been found that the styrene in styrofoam and the metabolites and byproducts of many plastics can have toxic effects on humans (particularly children and childbearing women) and therefore on all of the web of creation. Styrofoam products, plastic bottles, and plastic bags are the cause of major environmental concerns. Plastic bags are a nonrenewable resource, are a major part of our landfill waste, and litter the environment, sometimes being deadly to animals.

Traditional plastic bottles can take 1,000 years to degrade, and more than 40 million bottles a day become trash or litter in the United States.

We may eliminate our opportunity for healthy living through our reliance on synthetic chemicals by acting as a disposable society. We cannot make God’s Creation a wasteland of things created, used, and then discarded and still expect people or the rest of Creation to prosper. By seeking safer and more sustainable alternatives, all of us and particularly future generations can live a more faithful and just life.

Justice, peace, and the environment are interrelated. Whenever we humans abuse the environment, whenever we engage in non-sustainable consumption of our earth’s finite resources, we are not only endangering the future of life on our planet, but we are committing acts of violence and injustice against other life—both present and future. Protecting and restoring creation is central to our own survival.

We in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have a rich tradition of justice and reverence for life. Included in our mission is responsible and faithful stewardship of God’s earth. It is vital that we begin anew daily to find ways to care for others, our selves, and earth as our expressions of our love for God. We must find alternative, sustainable methods of living, so that not only future generations, but all of creation may have the opportunity to live healthy, full lives.