

PLASTIC FAST for LENT 2020

WHY FAST?

As a spiritual practice, fasting sharpens our intentions. Like a pebble in our shoe, the nagging feeling of hunger—or the discomfort of forgoing something we usually take for granted—is a persistent reminder to commit and recommit to inner transformation.

While many of us grew up “giving something up” for Lent, only to gleefully indulge in the forbidden item when the season passed, we hope that this fast will be more than a temporary exercise in deprivation and will help you make lasting changes in your everyday practices and mindset.

WHY PLASTIC?

- * If we continue to produce and discard plastic at the expected rates, our oceans will contain more plastic than fish by 2050.
- * As a byproduct of fossil fuels, plastics are the fastest growing and second largest source of industrial greenhouse gas emissions (according to the Center for International and Environmental Law).
- * Throughout its life-cycle—from production through the hundreds (if not thousands) of years after its disposal—plastic harms wildlife and human health. Among humans, this harm is experienced first and worst by communities of color, low-income communities and other vulnerable populations.

HOW TO USE THIS CALENDAR

A lot of the activities suggested here relate to individual consumption choices because these are areas of our lives where we often have the most agency to make changes. But while changing our consumption habits is a great place to start, it would be a terrible place to stop!

At Michigan IPL, we use the model of the 3-legged stool to think about change-making. One leg is about practical, local actions—like many of the actions suggested here. The second leg is about broader, structural change—change that is made through advocacy or voting, for example. And the third leg is about changing our spiritual orientations and relationships with others. During Lent and beyond, we encourage you to think about how you can make change in all of these dimensions.

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W 2/26	Genesis 1:26-27: "God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the...Earth itself." Meditate on this verse and take time to set your intentions for this season of fasting: What am I willing to sacrifice for the sake of protecting our common home? What life-long habits can I form? Who can I share this with?
TH 2/27	Take a few minutes to begin educating yourself about plastic pollution - https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/key-facts-about-plastic-pollution/ . Then, take a few more minutes to have a conversation about it with a friend, family member, or colleague.
F 2/28	This weekend, watch the documentary <i>A Plastic Ocean</i> and learn about why reducing plastic pollution is so important, especially for marine life - https://plasticoceans.org/about-a-plastic-ocean/ . Invite a friend or two to join you.
SA 2/29	Recycling your plastic is a good choice. A better choice? Avoid plastic all-together. Listen to this interview by Terry Gross to learn more about the after-life of plastic recyclables: https://www.npr.org/2019/09/12/760128833/waste-examines-the-global-and-local-afterlife-of-recyclables
SU 3/1	Think about this phrase from a Greenpeace report "Single-use plastics are used for moments and then last lifetimes."* One of the easiest ways to cut out single use plastics is to buy or make yourself a set of reusable shopping bags. And don't forget to keep them by your coat, in your car, or wherever you'll remember to carry them along. If you have more reusable bags than you need, find a fellow grocery shopper you notice is using a plastic bag, and give them an unexpected gift.
M 3/2	17 million barrels. That's how much oil it takes each year to meet Americans' demands for bottled water.* Reduce plastic AND save money by buying a reusable water bottle – or two! Keep one in your car, near your purse, and/or in your reusable shopping bag. Are you hooked on purified water? Try a refillable water bottle that simultaneously filters.*
TU 3/3	Skip the single-use coffee cup. Most to-go coffee is served with a plastic lid. Instead, bring your own re-usable mug. Often you'll get a discount for purchasing a "refill" at gas stations and coffee shops. Consider having a couple reusable cups, one in your bag and one in your car (or on your bike), so you're never caught without one.
W 3/4	Each year millions of single-use plastics get thrown out in the US.* You can help reduce this amount: when grabbing fast food or take out, request to have the plasticware left out. If you're eating on the go, keep your own set(s) of silverware in your bag or in the car.
TH 3/5	When grocery shopping stay away from single-serving plastic containers such as single portion yogurt, applesauce, crackers, nuts, etc. Rather, opt to buy larger quantities and divide them into smaller reusable containers.
F 3/6	Consumers have a personal responsibility to reduce plastic waste, but so do supermarkets. Most of the larger chains in the U.S. are doing little in the way of promoting plastic reduction. Take a few minutes today and tomorrow to read this report by Greenpeace and learn about what grocery store chains are doing, and not doing, to address the plastic problem: https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/reports/packaging-away-the-planet-2019/ . Should you reconsider where you do your grocery shopping?
SA 3/7	One of the biggest reasons plastic and other recyclable items end up in land-fills is because of the issue of contamination. When too many items that a given recycling system cannot handle end up mixed in with the many the items it can (as little as .5%*), the whole lot gets thrown out. To stop yourself from contributing to this, make sure all items you put into your recycling bin are: 1. clean (that means no greasy pizza boxes or items with food residue!) and 2. accepted by your local recycling provider. Even if you're <i>sure</i> you're already doing it right, check with your local

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	provider to find out exactly what they accept and what they do not. These things change over time!
SU 3/8	Take a few minutes to write an email to one of the major supermarket companies regarding plastic waste. You can use the article from the 3/6 for pointers on your "ask" from them. If letter-writing is not your forte, take a minute to find a local or national petition to sign that confronts one of the major grocery store chains on plastic reduction, such as this one https://www.change.org/p/kroger-reduce-plastic-in-grocery-chains-f107c8df-c2d6-46b8-9480-9c8308fe4e40
M 3/9	Of the 86 million tons of plastic packaging companies produce worldwide each year, only 14% is actually recycled.* Even if the plastic item's packaging is labeled as recyclable, and you've placed it in your recycling bin, the likelihood of the material being recycled depends upon commodity markets that change over time.* When confronted with the choice, choose food and other items that are not packaged in plastic. For example, choose a box of noodles over a bag of noodles, a paper bag of sugar over a plastic bag, or glass jar of juice over a plastic bottle. If using a straw, consider using a paper straw or reusable metal straw.
TU 3/10	Do you love flavored waters, juice or sparkly drinks? Opt for juices in glass jars over plastic. Better yet, most grocery stores sell flavors that can be added to water (although packaged in plastic, they produce much less waste). Consider purchasing a water-carbonator such as a Soda Stream. Add your own flavors or buy juice in a glass jar and mix it half and half with the soda for a satisfying beverage.
W 3/11	Choose produce that is not pre-packaged and bring your own bag for your produce. Choose supermarket chains that have more un-packaged produce options or shop at your local farmers market.
TH 3/12	Rather than buying pre-packaged deli meat and sliced cheese, bring your own re-usable container, and ask the deli personnel to package your order. If this feels awkward, bring a couple of friends along and make the request together. If they refuse, and you're still feeling brave, ask to speak to a manager.
F 3/13	Look into visiting your local recycling center to learn how your plastic is recycled. Most have opportunities for tours. Got kids, grandkids or nieces and nephews? Turn it into a field trip!
SA 3/14	Of all single use plastics, clamshell containers are the most difficult to recycle.* Because of the wide variety of shapes and sizes, facilities have a difficult time sorting them, as well as removing sticky residue such as sticker labels. If you buy a product in a clamshell, remove the sticker before recycling it.
SU 3/15	Did you know that only 5% or less of plastics in the U.S. are recycled?* Much of this is due to clamshell containers which are often not accepted by recycling centers. If your local recycling center doesn't accept clamshells, ask a local farmer at the farmer's market if they have use for your used produce clamshell container. Make sure you clean them well before donating them.
M 3/16	The best option when it comes to clamshell containers? Don't buy products packaged in them. Go for the scissors or toy that just have a tag or cardboard box, the lettuce that's tied together in a bunch, or the tomatoes that you can bag yourself.
TU 3/17	When eating out, bring your own re-usable container in lieu of a plastic take-home container for leftovers. Do the same when eating at the cafeteria, or another take-out place, where food is packaged in plastic clamshells.
W 3/18	Have you made the move away from plastic grocery bags yet? The next step is produce bags. Try saving other bags that food comes home in – bread bags, chip bags, cracker bags and cereal

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	bags. Store these bags in your reusable shopping bags and use them for bagging produce at the grocery store.
TH 3/19	Let's zoom out for a moment to consider how we can move our whole economy in a more sustainable direction. The Story of Solutions describes how two different ways of managing plastic—bottle deposits and a "ban the bag" campaign—are two very different types of intervention: the first is a "solution" that maintains a system of over-production and waste, while the second is a "game changer." Watch this 9-minute video and consider how you can be a game changer: https://storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-solutions/
F 3/20	Household cleaners are notorious for their plastic packaging. One easy switch? Change from using liquid detergent in a bottle, to using powdered detergent in a box. Want to save money too? Make your own using this easy recipe: https://wellnessmama.com/462/homemade-laundry-detergent/ . Want to use even less packaging? Try soap nuts: https://econutssoap.com/
SA 3/21	It's nice to have a spray bottle of all-purpose cleaner around, but a lot of plastic is wasted with each new bottle. Keep the last one you bought, and when it's empty add 2 cups of water, ½ cup vinegar, 1 tsp of castile soap (such as Dr. Bronner's) and some essential oils if you like a scent. Not only will you not be using many of the toxic ingredients found in typical household cleaners, but you'll cut back on plastic packaging.
SU 3/22	When buying cleaning tools, opt for a sponge/scrubber without a plastic handle. Better yet, buy a scrubber sponge made of natural materials such as a Twist Loofah Sponge, which you can find at most grocery stores. To find the plastic-free option, look for a label that says 100% plant based.
M 3/23	Although microfiber cloths may be excellent cleaning rags, they are essentially made of plastic. Studies have shown that microfibers are one the most common sources of plastic pollution in our waterways.* Help reduce water pollution by using cotton, hemp or wool rags. Save money by cutting up old clothing made from natural fibers into smaller pieces.
TU 3/24	Here's short video to give you a more in-depth look at microfibers: https://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-microfibers/ . Share it with others after you watch it!
W 3/25	Not only are we presented with the problem of microfibers in our cleaning supplies, but also in our clothing. When buying new clothes, opt for natural (and if possible, organic) materials such as rayon, cotton, bamboo, linen or wool. Here is a list of some good brands to choose from: https://www.thewellessentials.com/blog/10-budget-friendly-sustainable-fashion-brands
TH 3/26	Even better, opt to buy used clothing made from natural materials – there are some good online thrift or consignment websites, where you can filter by material https://www.swap.com/ , https://www.thredup.com/ and https://wornwear.patagonia.com/
F 3/27	Another good choice for helping to keep microplastics out of the waterways is to wash your clothing made with microfibers (most synthetic materials) in a special bag that catches the fibers, such as https://en.guppyfriend.com/
SA 3/28	The Bible is full of verses that describe God's intimate relationship with creation. Take a few minutes to meditate on Psalm 104:10-15 (<i>New International Version</i>): "He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts."

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SU 3/29	Plastic waste (“recycling”) from first world countries such as the U.S. is often transported to the most vulnerable communities in third world countries such as Malaysia. Here the plastic waste pile-up poses a public health crisis. Read the following article to learn more: https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/21792/plastic-waste-environmental-justice/
M 3/30	We are all familiar with the three R’s – reduce, reuse, recycle. By far the first one is the most effective and necessary for saving our environment. Think back on the last few weeks. Besides cleaning products, food packaging and clothing, what are other ways that plastic waste creeps into your life?
TU 3/31	In recent years there is a growing movement of young people committed to “zero waste.” Although this commitment may seem daunting, because of the excessive packaging used in our society, any person can begin to make small changes in their consumption habits. Read this article to learn a bit more about the movement: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/05/zero-waste-families-plastic-culture/
W 4/1	Take a few minutes to reflect on what Pope Francis says: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” – from <i>Laudato si</i> . How can you or your congregation change purchasing choices in order be a better protector of God’s creation?
TH 4/2	Remember back in February when you started to bring your own bags to the store for produce? What if there is no unpackaged option? Consider taking a bold step, and send a message to the grocery store by leaving the packaging at the check-out counter. Nervous about this kind of action? Bring a few friends to do it along with you.
F 4/3	Looking forward to lent being over? Consider the 30 day Zero Waste Challenge for Easter time: https://www.goingzerowaste.com/30-day-zero-waste-challenge/
SA 4/4	Kids’ toys are often made of plastic. If you have a young person in your life you’re planning on buying a plaything for, consider switching to toys made from recycled plastic, wood, metal or natural fabrics. A few good brands to check out are Taraluna - https://taraluna.com/collections/organic-fair-trade-toys , Hape - https://www.hape.com/us/en , Magic Cabin - https://www.magiccabin.com/en/ and Green Toys - https://www.greentoys.com/ .
SU 4/5	Before you buy a new toy, help to reduce production of new items and consider buying a used item in good shape. Many kid’s consignment shops carry good used options. There are also online options such as https://kidizen.com/ or https://offerup.com/explore/k/kids-toys/ . Do you have old toys that are still in good shape that you’re looking to get rid of? Consider donating them to http://www.secondchancetoys.org/
M 4/6	Office and school supplies are another culprit in the production of plastic waste. Buy your plastic binders used at your local thrift store or at a recycled crafts store (such as Arts & Scraps in Detroit or Scrap Box in Ann Arbor). Opt for wooden pencils over mechanical pencils. Choose cardboard covered notebooks over plastic, and the same with folders. Many schools participate in a collection program through Crayola for used felt tip markers. The brand Onyx and Green offers office supplies that are made from sustainable sources. Buy a tape dispenser and refills to cut down on waste from smaller single use tape dispensers. Pilot has pens that are made from plastic water bottles (B2P) and are also refillable.
TU 4/7	Personal care items often are packaged in plastic. Opt for bars of soap over soap dispensers, shampoo bars over shampoo bottles and razor blades that are reusable (TerraCycle has a

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	program for used razor heads.) Avoid buying travel sized bottles and refill ones you already have when traveling.
W 4/8	Over the past several weeks we've explored many ways to reduce your plastic use. Sit down with a pen and paper and brainstorm other places where plastic is present in your life. Then, brainstorm ways to replace that plastic and even do some research to see what others are doing.
TH 4/9	Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe explains that having conversations is the first step in solving a problem.* As you gather with loved ones around the holidays, be purposeful in having some of those difficult conversations. Share what you've learned about the problem of plastic and simple steps your friends, family and/or faith community can take to help.
F 4/10	What have you learned about plastic this lent? What do you still have to learn? Take this quick quiz from National Geographic: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/quizzes/plastics-quiz/
SA 4/11	On this last day of lent, take time to reflect on what you've learned. What aspects of this plastic fast can you carry into ordinary time? How can you share what you've learned? How can you take your actions and choices around plastic to a deeper level? Let this be just the beginning of a life-long journey where you join the rest of humanity in moving away from plastics for good.

SOURCES:

- 3/1 <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/reports/packaging-away-the-planet-2019/>
3/2 <https://green.harvard.edu/tools-resources/green-tip/reasons-avoid-bottled-water> and <https://www.waterfiltermag.com/best-filtered-water-bottle-reviews/>
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3/7: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/climate/recycling-wrong-mistakes.html>
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