Everyday we use personal care products such as soap, lotion, shampoo, deodorant, shaving products, cologne, or makeup. These products can contain toxic chemicals because they are not regulated by the federal government. As people of faith our faith tradition provides guidance on why our choices for personal care products are a matter of justice and bodily stewardship.

**WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (GENESIS 1:26)**
We are all made in the image of God and it’s important to know that God loves us each the way we are made.

**CARING FOR OUR BODIES AS TEMPLES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20)**
Everyday we apply products that are absorbed through our skin, inhaled, or ingested. We should be mindful of what is in the products we use. Many of them (especially the leading brands) contain at least one chemical that may be harmful in the long term. Note that “all natural” product labels should also be read carefully. Animal studies predict that the chemicals in personal care products can contribute to changes in childhood puberty, reproductive dysfunction, birth defects, and even cancer. Men, women, and children are all susceptible to these chemicals.
WE ARE ALL VULNERABLE, AND YET SOME ARE MORE AT RISK
Children are divine (Matthew 18:2-4; Canticles Rab- bah 1:4), and yet most at risk. There are a number of cosmetics products targeted to babies and children such as baby shampoo, powder, lotion, and cream. A 2008 study found that after using baby cosmetic products, the babies’ urine showed detectable levels of a chemical family called phthalates. New research links phtha- lates to early onset puberty in girls, testicular cancer, and reproductive defects in baby boys. Fetal exposure to phthalates, lead, mercury, and other chemicals may also have both short and long term health effects.

We are taught to love thy neighbor as thyself (Leviti- cus 19:18; Mark 12:31), but low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to face greater exposure to toxic chemicals. Toxic waste sites, trash transfer stations, and chemical production facilities tend to be located in these communities, increasing exposure to toxic material. Low-income communities may also lack access to safer cosmetics products. In addition, some products marketed to people of color often contain particularly problematic or toxic ingredients.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Become informed
Visit www.nccecojustice.org/cosmetics.html to learn more about this issue and what you can do. Check out the Skin Deep database to look up specific products: www.cosmeticdatabase.com/. Visit the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics to see which companies signed on to the Compact for Safe Cosmetics and which organizations are members of the campaign: www.safecosmetics.org.

Less is more
Products with fewer ingredients are more likely to be safer for you. Look for unscented products or ones only scented with essential oils. Avoid products with a bunch of names that are hard to pronounce. Some chemicals to steer clear of include:
• Placenta—Found in some hair conditioners or skin treatments.
• Mercury—Often called thimerosal and is found in some mascara, skin lighteners and eye drops.
• Hydroquinone—Frequently found in skin lightening products and in some hair dyes.
• Lead—Found in some lipsticks. One study tested 33 top brands of lipsticks and found lead in more than half of them. Visit www.safecosmetics.org/your_health/poisonkiss.cfm.
• Phthalates—Often found in “fragrances,” hair spray, and some nail polish.
• Toluene—Found in some nail polish.
• Formaldehyde—Found in some nail polish. A contaminant found in several personal care products, it is not often listed in the ingredients.

• In 2007 OPI and other leading nail polish manufacturers agreed to remove phthalates, toluene, and formaldehyde from their nail polish.
• 1,4 Dioxane—A common contaminant found in products that contain the following: “PEG,” “polyethylene,” “polyethylene glycol,” “polyoxyethylene,” “-eth,” “oxynol” “ceteareth,” or “oleth.” It’s linked in animal tests to cancer. It costs pennies to remove it, and yet it is found in many popular cosmetics, including baby washes.

Spread the Good News
Gather with friends and other members of your faith community to learn more and to make non-toxic personal care products. Look for the upcoming Made in the Image of God: A healthy spa toolkit for congregations.

We can’t shop our way out of this problem
Safe and regulated products for consumers should be the answer. We need elected officials to enact an updated policy that will prevent toxic chemicals in personal care products and provide us with healthy choices to care for our bodies.

National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program
110 Maryland Avenue NE Suite 108
Washington, DC 20002
www.nccecojustice.org/envhealthhome.htm
info@nccecojustice.org
202-544-2350