As people of faith, we often turn to the Bible for advice on how we should live and improve our lives. Turning to scripture, we often think of self-improvement and self-care in spiritual terms and seek ways to purify our souls, make our hearts more loving, and better conform our minds to Christ. For issues that concern our physical bodies, however, most of us are conditioned to look elsewhere for answers. And yet, despite this, the Bible does teach us how we must think about and care for our bodies. Scripture teaches us that we are all created in the image of God and that our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit.

We honor God when we take steps to foster an environment that promotes healthy living for creation and for each other. When we disregard the importance of a world that is clean and safe, however, our bodily temples suffer, and we fall short in honoring our Creator.

The pervasiveness of pollution across the land, water, and air, and the presence of harmful chemicals in the manufacturing process of nearly every man-made item, make the health dangers of chemicals and pollution a sobering problem. Household cleaning products contain potential poisons. The food on our tables can contain harmful pesticides. Even our water, used for drinking, bathing, cleaning, and cooking, may be contaminated with dangerous chemicals. Pollution of the air and water, and the presence of harmful chemicals in everyday household items contribute to an unprecedented incidence of illness. Environmental degradation has been linked to diseases that range from asthma and cancer to developmental disorders in children. In fact, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable to these widespread contaminants. This unnecessary burden of a polluted Earth is an insult to the perfection of God’s creation and a desecration to our bodily temples.

Toxic pollution is also a justice issue. Toxic pollutants and chemicals disproportionately threaten the health of low-income communities and communities of color. According to the report *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987-2007*, issued by the United Church of Christ, “people of color make up the majority of those living in host neighborhoods within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the nation’s hazardous waste facilities.”

Yet, despite these alarming realities, there is hope for change. With mindful living, active citizenship, responsive governmental action, and business leadership, we can all live out God’s vision for our lives with wholeness and abundance.

**Our Covenantal Relationship** From the beginning of time, people have lived in an interdependent relationship with God’s Earth. In Genesis 1, all of creation was declared by God to be good. The light and dark, the Earth and sky, the land and sea, the plants and trees, all the wild animals, and the fullness of humankind were all formed in love and with the intention to carry out the work of God. Humanity was given the privileged, yet difficult, task of acting as stewards of God’s Earth and preserving the life-sustaining work of creation. Our role, as stewards of God’s creation, calls us to work for the abundant and healthy environment that we all need and depend on for our existence.

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We Know Not What We Do  Too often, humanity forgets its God-given responsibility to care for all of creation. Instead, we abuse our privileged positions as stewards and treat the world as a means to serve our own selfish purposes. When we use up God’s abundance for the immediate benefit of ourselves alone, we have forgotten our responsibility as stewards. The architect of this world masterfully designed a system in which all elements are related for the common good and for the sustainability of life itself. When we overstep the bounds of our role within this system, we run the risk of turning creation into a wasteland.

Pollution Problems  Pollution occurs when human activities contaminate God’s Earth with harmful substances. This contamination, which can occur in the water, air, and land, not only endangers human health but has devastating effects on the rest of God’s creation. Air pollution is often caused by carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), and nitrogen oxides produced by motor vehicles, power plants, and industrial processes. Water pollution, which often occurs as a result of surface runoff from farmland or urban areas, can contaminate waterways and ground water with toxics, pesticides, or excess nutrients. Soil contamination occurs when chemicals such as heavy metals, herbicides, or pesticides are absorbed into the ground. Increased awareness of pollution problems has led to governmental policies such as vehicle emission controls, the Clean Air Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1963, and the Clean Water Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1977.

Toxic Legacies  Synthetic chemicals are pervasive in our modern lives—in our homes, schools, and churches. These seemingly invisible, yet toxic chemicals, are found in everyday items from baby bottles to personal care products to the food we eat. These synthetic chemicals and heavy metals in consumer products, building materials, cleaners, and plastics are contributing to unprecedented incidences of illness and disease ranging from asthma to cancer.
Over the last one hundred years, we have produced millions of tons of chemicals for the manufacture of new products. Some of these chemicals have made our lives faster and more convenient. While many of these chemicals were rigorously tested to ensure that they could perform their intended tasks, their long-term impact on our bodies and on the rest of creation has been largely ignored. More than 82,000 synthetic chemicals are currently in use. Only ten percent have been minimally tested for their effects on human health. Nearly 1,000 new chemicals are being introduced each year. These largely untested, unregulated chemicals end up in our food, water, air, and consumer products, and have serious implications for our health and wellness.

Effects of Toxic Chemicals A study by the British Medical Journal concluded that seventy-five percent of most cancers are caused by environmental and lifestyle factors. In fact, most Americans have between 400 to 800 chemicals stored in their bodies, typically in fat cells. Health effects of toxic chemicals include cancer, asthma, birth defects, and autism. According to a 2002 report by the Environmental Protection Agency, in the year 2000, over 7.1 billion pounds of 650 different industrial chemicals were released in the air and water; 266 of these are linked to birth defects.

For example, toxic flame retardants, such as PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers), have been linked to behavioral problems, birth defects, and a decrease in thyroid hormone levels. Similarly, perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), chemicals used to make materials stain and stick resistant, are likely human carcinogens. Also, various types of pesticides, which are chemicals sprayed onto our foods to kill insects and weeds, have immediate effects on the nervous system and may impair the brain development of children. In the rush to introduce new chemicals, we unfortunately learn about their harmful effects long after the damage is already done.

Environmental Triggers and Disease Research by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has shown that although genetics is an important predictor of health challenges, triggers in the environment often propel a person towards disease. So, while someone may have a predisposition to a particular illness, the disease may never develop if not first prompted by exposure to a chemical or other environmental factor. Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to environmental contaminants. Rates of asthma and

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HOUSECLEANING THE NATURAL WAY

Use these easy household recipes to help make your home toxic-free (adapted from World Wildlife Fund)

**Oven Cleaner**
Clean grease with rag and vinegar. Sprinkle salt on spill. Let it sit for a few minutes, then scrape the spill and wash the area clean. For stubborn spots, use baking soda and steel wool.

**Window Cleaner**
½ cup vinegar
1 gallon warm water
Fill spray bottle.

**Stain Remover**
Soak fabrics in water mixed with borax, lemon juice, hydrogen peroxide, or white vinegar.

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FENCeline Communities and Environmental Racism
Industrial plants and waste facilities, both in urban or rural areas, are often located next to low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Because of the proximity of these toxic plants, these communities, known as fenceline communities, often experience higher rates of asthma, cancer, and other health damage. Environmental racism is a term used to define policies and actions that disadvantage individuals or groups based on race, color, or income. By learning the stories of people in our own regions, we can work with these vulnerable populations to improve living conditions for all of God’s people.

You can locate and learn about sites in your region at www.scorecard.org.
developmental problems are on the rise, as well as the incidence of cancers. Many of these chemicals are seriously jeopardizing our overall quality of life.

**Stagnancy** The intended design of creation is one in which interdependence of all living things is celebrated and encouraged. The lessons of interdependence, both joyful and challenging, are what makes life abundant. We may eliminate our opportunity for abundant living through our reliance on synthetic chemicals. We cannot make God’s Earth a wasteland of things created, used, and then discarded and still expect people or the rest of God’s creation to prosper. Exposure to air pollution, water contamination, toxic substances, heavy metals, endocrine disrupters, and carcinogens turn God’s cycle-of-life design into a truncated lifeline. By instead seeking safer, and more sustainable alternatives, all of us as part of God’s creation can live a full, and abundant, life.

**Purity as Holiness** Ridding the Earth of all pollution and toxic chemicals that trigger illness is part of the work to which we are called as stewards of creation and advocates for justice. Any effort given toward purifying the body—the Earth’s, our own, and others—shows respect for the divine artist whose masterpiece is our context for living.

It is also the pursuit of holiness, God’s creation, of which we are only one part, is sacred. We should treat it with great care to ensure that the breath of life can flow rhythmically through the collective body. Our own bodies, as temples of God, need to be purged of pollution and toxic matter so that the work of God can continue and flourish in each of us. The way we move, work, and play in the world should foster creation’s interdependence, where each member of creation in some way contributes to the health of the whole. In this way, creation is continually animated by the spirit of God and regularly resurrected.

In 2 Corinthians we are reminded to purify everything that contaminates body and spirit. It is not enough to lessen our contamination from pollution and toxic chemicals. We must attempt to eliminate them altogether. We must seek to find ways to live that do not endanger ourselves or others. Our waste should not accumulate in a landfill so that it poisons the land and people living nearby. Our daily living should not use or release toxic pollution or chemicals that cause environmental degradation and human illness. Rather, our lifestyles should allow God’s creation and God’s people to flourish.

The kind of purification that leads to resurrection requires that we know about the pollution that our lifestyles create and the chemicals that are entering our bodies. Our bodies are meant to be a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:21), a temple out of which grows a pure heart. Matthew 5:8 says “blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Purity in this sense is freedom from conflicting motives; it occurs when we are motivated first and only by our love of God. Only when the spirit of God, which initially gave rise to the diverse aspects of creation, can live in us and flow through us will the whole of creation be renewed. A pure body both leads to and stems from a pure heart.

**The Fruits We Bear** Every day we make choices about our daily living—from which transportation we use to what household cleaning products we choose, to our selection of lawn care products. We tend to think of these as individual decisions concerning only us, but we are called to consider how we are affecting all of creation. What impact will our actions today have on those who come after us? How will they influence those around us? What bearing will they have on our own lives? Are they helping to purify the body and spirit of creation? If we are able to discipline ourselves to regularly ask these questions and respond to them with the intention that comes from loving God first (Luke 10:27), then our work as stewards will ensure that all of creation can experience the spirit of God flowing with each breath.

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Purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians 7:1
PCBs and other chlorine-based chemicals may threaten the ability of polar bears to reproduce.

**Living an Abundant Life**  
Life may not always be easy; but it will be abundant. Ezekiel 47:12 gives us a picture of this abundant life. It is the picture of a river flowing with water that springs forth from the sanctuary and nourishes the trees growing on both banks. The fruits of these trees are plentiful and are good for food and the leaves promote healing. Ridding ourselves and our world of the toxic chemicals upon which we have come to rely on will purify the sanctuary and allow for the love of God to “water” the Earth.

**Farming Faithfully**
Rural communities are blessed with fresh and varied produce that are not always found in urban or suburban supermarkets. However, rural farmers also face unique environmental health concerns related to food production. Many farm workers and small farmers who work with traditional farming practices are often exposed to pesticides that are harmful to human health. Studies have found higher rates of prostate cancer, breast cancer, retinal degeneration, and Parkinson’s disease among farm workers exposed to pesticides. Often these same farm workers are paid low wages, guaranteed work for only a season, and receive little or no health benefits. Notably, the majority of farm workers are people of color and overwhelmingly Latino.

In June 2007, the Environmental Protection Agency released a list of known or suspected endocrine disruptors, which help control our bodily functions and development. All the chemicals on the list are pesticides.

To improve the health of small farmers and farm workers, farmers can use more sustainable farming techniques that disrupt pests without chemicals. Consumers can also help by supporting local, organic farms that bring produce to urban farmers’ markets. As a faith community we can bring voice to the health concerns of vulnerable rural communities and encourage large corporate farms to enforce safety standards, stop the application of the most harmful pesticides, and provide health care benefits to their farm workers.
DeMystifying the Chemical Alphabet Soup

It can be challenging to spell and even pronounce many of the chemicals found in our everyday lives. Understanding the impacts that these chemicals have on our bodies and communities, and then determining ways to reduce any harmful effects can be daunting. Below is a list of chemicals to particularly avoid if possible. There are safer alternatives to some of our most toxic chemicals, but we can do more.

Bisphenol-A
This chemical is commonly found in hard, clear plastic #7 bottles, tableware, bike helmets, aluminum cans, and dental sealants. Bisphenol-A has been known to cause cancer, hormonal changes, changes in menstruation patterns, accelerated or delayed puberty, obesity and type II diabetes in animal studies. Avoid Bisphenol-A by using stainless steel drinking bottles or #5 plastic baby bottles. Also avoid canned foods or purchase uncoated aluminum products.

Dioxins
Dioxin is a group of chlorinated chemicals found in the pulp, paper, and PVC plastic manufacturing industries. It also comes from the incineration of chlorine-containing materials. Exposure to dioxins occurs mostly by consuming fatty food, especially meat and dairy products, and the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl) products. Associated health effects include immune suppression and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Formaldehyde
Formaldehyde is used as a disinfectant and can be found in synthetic resins, wood, dyes, and plastics products. Sources of formaldehyde include building materials, wood products, fuel-burning appliances, adhesives, and paints. Associated health effects include cancer and respiratory illness such as asthma.

Lead
Lead is used in building construction, paints, batteries, pipes, and other metals. Although lead has been phased out of paint and gasoline, lead still poses a significant threat to individuals, especially children and pregnant women who come in contact with lead paint in old houses. Associated health effects of lead exposure include fertility problems, cognitive impairment, developmental delay, and chronic renal disease.

Mercury
The main sources of mercury include coal-fired power plants, waste incinerators, and industrial boilers with exposure coming primarily through the consumption of fish once mercury leaves the atmosphere and enters waterways. Associated health effects of mercury exposure include birth defects, heart disease, nervous system disorders, and mental retardation. Women of child-bearing years, in

Acting as a canary-in-the-coalmine warning to us, hundreds of bird deaths have been reported from toxic fumes produced from the use of non-stick pans and products.

Adding it All Up
Scientists have recently begun to study the impacts of not just one chemical in our bodies, but the effects of multiple chemicals interacting within our bodies. These studies indicate that the timing and combinations of exposures—a chemical cocktail—as well as the dose level of a contaminant can increase the risk of being harmed.
Passing it on

Many chemicals such as lead and mercury are stored in the fatty tissues of animals. This bioaccumulation occurs when toxics are absorbed and cannot be released from the animal’s body. These toxic chemicals are then “passed on” when the animals are consumed, either by humans or other predators. Fish such as Swordfish and King Mackerel, for example, store mercury, which when consumed by vulnerable populations, such as women and children, can harm their health.

Body burden refers to how chemicals build up in our bodies, finding their way into blood and breast milk, eventually impacting our health.

Particular, should avoid consuming fish, such as swordfish and king mackerel, that contains high levels of mercury.

**Perfluorochemicals (PFCs)**

PFCs are used for non-stick products and stain- and water-repelling substances under brand names such as Teflon, Gore-tex and Scotch-Guard. They are considered by scientists to be among the most hazardous contaminants ever produced. PFCs are found in the blood of more than 90 percent of the U.S. population, and have been linked to cancer and birth defects. In 2006, the eight largest users and producers of PFOA, a kind of PFC, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated a likely human carcinogen, signed an agreement with the EPA to virtually eliminate PFOA pollution by 2015.

**Phthalate**

Phthalates are synthetic chemical substances used to make plastics, like PVC (vinyl), more flexible and enable personal care products and detergents to hold scent. They are found in toothbrushes, automobile parts, toys, personal body products, and food packaging. The health effects of phthalate exposure include birth defects, hormonal changes, and infertility. Exposure to phthalates can be reduced by avoiding microwaving food in plastic containers or wraps, and by buying unscented products. Parents should look for toys and teething products that are “phthalate free.”

**Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs)**

Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs) are bromine-based chemicals used as flame retardants that can be found in household products such as computers, televisions, mobile phones, furniture, and textiles. While this chemical additive offers protection from fire, these chemicals persist in the environment and can be found in breast milk, passing from mother to infant. The health effects of PBDEs include thyroid cancer, developmental delays, and hearing loss. Many leading companies are finding innovative ways to reduce the flammability of their products without using PBDEs. Cotton and wool are both naturally fire resistant.
MY BODY, GOD’S TEMPLE
Based on Gen 1:27; 2:7; Rom 8:18-27; 1 Cor 6:19-20

Cultures, like the Mayan culture, that place an emphasis on intergenerational celebration and connection to God’s Earth have an inherited understanding of our interdependence with all that surrounds us. We co-exist in community. These cultures dismantle the false views of individual freedom or independence. Christ came to free us from sin and death, not from one another. We are the only creatures who need to create ‘culture’ to survive. God co-exists in community as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of all that is. God made us in God’s image and from the living soil. In our relationship with God and the world around us, we find our meaning, health, and true freedom.

LIVING AS RESURRECTED
Based on Deut 30:19-20; Mt 10:7-8; Jn 10:10; 11:24-27; Rom 6:1-20; 8:12-17; Rev 21:1-8

Theologian Elsa Tamez in a study of Romans 6 and 8, shares that we ought to live as resurrected. Living as resurrected implies living a daily life on God’s Earth that points to an experience of full transformation, an intentional and conscious journey from a state of death and all that such a state implies, to a state of fullness of life.

We proclaim the new heaven and the new Earth, the resurrection of the body, not only as an eschatological promise but sealed in Christ, living our lives as if God's Kingdom is already among us (Mt 6:10).

The Earth is included in this promise (Mk 16:15, Rev 5:13; 11:18; 22:1-2). The question left is—How do we bring about fullness of life within our own contexts and livelihoods? What is causing death and sickness among us? What is causing pollution amongst us? How do we help the Earth heal? How can we heal?

Living as resurrected is possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is lived through spiritualities that guide us to choose life and free us from the grip of deadly choices. Jesus said: You will know them by their fruits (Lk 6:44). Christ reminds us He came so we may all have life and have it abundantly.

HEALTH AND SALVATION
Based on Isa 65:17-25; 55:1-13; Lk 8:43-48;
Mt 10:7b-8, 1 Thess 5:23

In the Old Testament, salvation is often described as the space that God creates for the life of God’s people. The fertile land is given as a salvific act from God for the well being of God’s people. Salvation also happens when God delivers God’s people from their enemies (Ex 14:13-14, 30). Other examples of salvation are also found in acts of redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

In the New Testament, Jesus delivers people from spiritual and physical bondage and restores them to community. Healing is a salvific act, a step closer to the coming of God’s Kingdom. When the Kingdom of God is near, and when the Word of God is among us, the poor heal, the young do not die and the old live long. When the Kingdom of God is near, no one goes hungry, life flourishes, and the wicked forsake their way. Salvation and healing go hand in hand. Salvation implies health and security. They coexist as elements of the same promise. The challenge for our faith is to see these two things together and to live them out.
SAFER ALTERNATIVES

The precautionary principle holds that God's children and communities should be protected and safe from harmful chemicals. Human health is intricately linked to the health of God's creation. The products we buy can impact the health of our bodies. “Green” chemists are working on finding safer alternatives to toxic chemicals. These safer alternatives reduce health damage and pose less of a threat to the rest of God's creation. Safer alternatives not only protect consumers but also create healthier work places and a safer world for our children.

GREEN TIP
HOLO HOUSECLEANING

Many traditional cleaning products release gases called volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can cause eye, skin, and respiratory irritations. Non-toxic cleaners can be made with everyday household ingredients. Try this recipe to make your home or your house of worship shine! Find more recipes at www.nccecojustice.org/envhealthhome.htm

All purpose cleaner
3 tsp. liquid soap, or
¼ cup vinegar, or
¼ cup lemon juice, or
¼ cup Borax
(per gallon of water)

For more information on Environmental Health and other programs to protect all God's creation, visit the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Programs website at: www.nccecojustice.org. Contact us at info@nccecojustice.org or call 202-544-2350.

Mindful Living

Human Health, Pollution, and Toxics

As people of faith we often turn to the Bible to seek self improvement and spiritual self-care. We look for ways in scripture to purify our souls, make our hearts more loving, and to better conform our minds to Christ. The Bible also offers us ways to care for our physical bodies, even though traditionally we seek these answers in other places.

Scripture teaches us that we are all created in the image of God and that our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Our 21st century lifestyles, however, often cause our bodies to reflect modern lifestyles more than sacred living. There are over 82,000 synthetic chemicals used in everyday household items, emulsifiers, automotive, agricultural, food processing, and other industries. We are exposed to these chemicals in our homes and work places, in the food that nourishes us, and in the air we breathe. Alarmingly, only ten percent of these chemicals have been tested for their effects on human health.

Today, pollution of the air and water, and the presence of harmful chemicals in everyday household items, contributes to an unprecedented incidence of illness. Environmental degradation has been linked to diseases that range from asthma and cancer to developmental disorders and obesity in children. Ridding the Earth of all pollution and toxic chemicals is part of the work we are called to do as stewards of creation and advocates for justice. Any effort towards purifying the body—the Earth's, our own, and others—is a sign of respect for the divine architect whose masterpiece is our context for living.
CALL TO WORSHIP

Spirit of Life
Come and feed us with your love and grace.

Spirit of Consolation
Come and embrace us with your presence and your vision.

Spirit of Hope
Come and fill us with a new word, a word that may free us to serve.

Spirit of Openness
Come and convert us to one another, without fears, indifference or exclusions.

Spirit of Acceptance
Come and hold us in the new Earth that you are creating.

Spirit of the Universe
Come and move us to the sound of your groaning.

Amen

Prayer of the People

Leader: For the love and much more, may your Kingdom come, Lord.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who suffer the effects of chemical exposure, that they may find healing and hope.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our food, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the products we buy, the products we make, that they may be free from that which causes harm, so we may sustain and improve our lives, and so our bodies be kept sound and balanced for the building of the Kingdom of God.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the healing power of the Earth, that may overturn any harm we have made, and so it may teach us how to live in the love with which God created the Earth.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our bodies, temples of Holy Spirit, that we may seek pleasures that sustain life as God meant it for all generations.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who create laws that protect us from harm, for scientists, and for those who are raising awareness about the negative impacts of our actions on the Earth and our health.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who suffer the effects of chemical exposure, that they may find healing and hope.
People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For this and much more, may your Kingdom come, Lord.
People: Amen

Prayer of Confession

Christ Lord, you called us to serve and protect, to till and to keep, but we muddied the waters we drank, we hurt ourselves and the least of these. In our desire to be great, we forgot to serve. We confused dominion with selfish destruction, and your love with our selfish freedom. May your Spirit heal the Earth, our bodies, and our souls. May we find our place within your creation. Forgive us, and lead us, we pray.

Amen

Assurance of Pardon

Like the soil that wraps the seed as soon as it falls, and like the sun that surely rises each and every morning, so is the love of God. God’s love stands ready to embrace, lead, and forgive. May we feel free to serve as children of God in the manner of our hearts. We pray, Lord, that you call us to serve, and heal us, we pray.

Amen

Prayer of Forgiveness

Come and move us to the sound of your groaning.

Amen

Script of Communion

Come and hold us in the new Earth that you are creating.

Script of Preadam.

Come and convert us to one another, without fears, indifference or exclusion.

Script of Hope

Come and end us with your love and grace.

Script of Creation

Come and embrace us with your presence and your vision.

Script of Life

Come and hold us in the new Earth that you are creating.

Script of Assurance

Like the soil that wraps the seed as soon as it falls, and like the sun that surely rises each and every morning, so is the love of God. God’s love stands ready to embrace, lead, and forgive. May we feel free to serve as children of God in the manner of our hearts. We pray, Lord, that you call us to serve, and heal us, we pray.

Amen

Sending Forth

May the God of peace sanctify you and heal you and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and balanced for the building of the Kingdom of God. May the Word of God lead you to choose Life. May your bodies be temples of Holy Spirit, that you may seek pleasures that sustain life as God meant it for all generations.

Amen
Adult Study and Discussion Questions

My Body, God’s Temple
• Discuss a memory of community from your childhood.
• After reading Romans 8:18-27 discuss what was meant by creation’s groaning and then being set free from its bondage.
• After reading 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 discuss what it means for our bodies to be temples of the Holy Spirit.

Living as Resurrected
• Discuss how to bring more fullness into your life.
• Discuss what is causing death and sickness among us.
• Discuss ways we can help creation heal.

Health and Salvation
• Discuss how healing and salvation can go hand in hand.
• After reading Isaiah 65:17-25 discuss what you think is meant by a glorious new creation.

FOURTEEN PERSONAL ACTIONS

1. Avoid pesticide exposure by consuming organic fruits and vegetables whenever possible. Non-organic produce lowest in pesticides include onions, avocados, frozen sweet corn, pineapples, mangos, asparagus, frozen sweet peas, kiwi fruit, bananas, cabbage, broccoli, and papaya.
2. Avoid eating fish such as tuna, swordfish, grouper, and halibut that contain high levels of mercury. Instead, eat seafood with the lowest mercury content such as Mid-Atlantic blue crab, croaker, summer flounder, haddock, farmed trout, and wild Pacific salmon.
3. Minimize packaged food including microwave popcorn and fast foods, which can contain PFCs.
4. Many personal care products contain toxic chemicals, which we then apply right onto our skin. Buy fragrance-free products and avoid products with hydroquinone, lead, mercury, alpha and beta hydroxyl acids, parabens, terephthalalime, iodopropynly butycarbamate, and triclosan. Visit www.safecosmetics.org to learn more.
5. Use cast iron instead of non-stick cookware.
6. Avoid items that have been treated for water, stain, or dirt repellency, or fire resistance such as some furniture, carpets, and clothing. Instead, buy products with natural fibers such as cotton or wool, which are naturally fire resistant.
7. Research your local water utility’s Consumer Confidence Report for high levels of toxins. Consider purchasing a water filtration system to reduce harmful contaminants.
8. Avoid microwaving food in plastic.
9. Choose non-toxic cleaning products or make your own from ingredients such as vinegar, lemon juice, and baking soda. Avoid the use of chlorine bleach.
10. Avoid tracking in pesticides and toxic chemicals by taking off your shoes at the door.
11. Choose play areas not made with CCA (chromated copper arsenate) pressure-treated wood.
12. Avoid using pesticides in your home, on your lawn or garden, yourself, or pets. Do not use sunscreen with the pesticide DEET or other insect repellant. In your garden, use disease and pest resistant plants, improve your soil health, increase the health of your plants by adding compost, and reduce stress on plants by using mulch.
13. Buy toys and teethers that are phthalate free.
14. Avoid #7 plastic baby and drink bottles, and aluminum cans. These products are coated with Bisphenol-A. Instead, look for uncoated aluminum, #5 plastic, or stainless steel containers.
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IDEAS FOR YOUTH GROUPS

Conduct a Toxic Inventory at Church. Hunt down chemical usage in your church by making a list of chemicals used to clean the buildings, maintain the property, and serve foods at fellowship meals. Research the effects these chemicals have on the environment and people. Present your findings, as well as safe alternative suggestions, to your congregation. For a useful audit guide, visit www.nccecojustice.org/envhealthhome.htm.

Host a toxic free car wash to raise awareness in your community about toxic chemicals and to promote safe alternatives to common cleaners.

Create a Toxic-Free Stewardship Banner to display in the church. Use non-toxic art supplies to design a banner that expresses our role as stewards of God’s Earth.

Organize a Pesticide- and Trash-Free Potluck Invite church and community members to a fellowship potluck meal at the church using only reusable napkins and durable plates, utensils, and serving dishes. Send out invitations encouraging participants to adhere to certain guidelines when preparing their food offering. Suggestions could include providing organic, non-processed foods grown with no chemicals.

For more information on how you can help protect God’s creation and God’s people, visit the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program website at www.nccecojustice.org. Contact: info@nccecojustice.org / 202-544-2350

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