The Business Committee of the Thirty-Second General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

RESOLUTION REGARDING THE USE OF PLASTIC FOAM (i.e. Styrofoam®)
A Resolution of Witness
Submitted by the Penn Central Conference

SUMMARY

Single-use plastic foam products are used throughout the United States in the form of coffee cups and take-out food containers. Plastic foam is a known pollutant, and components of plastic foam are known carcinogens in animals and are suspected carcinogens in humans. Landfills are filling up with plastics, and it takes 500 years for plastics to decompose. Alternatives to plastic foam packaging are readily available. Therefore, all persons of faith are encouraged to reduce their use of plastic foam.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Genesis 1:9-10. And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:20-22. And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

Genesis 1:31. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 9: 1-5. God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

Numbers 35:33-34. You shall not pollute the land in which you live: for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites.

Isaiah 41:17. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
Luke 12:42-48  And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says to himself, "My master is delayed in coming," and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

God was pleased with His creation. All of creation was given over to humankind, to sustain and please us. In exchange, God commands that we care for creation. God also commands that we care for the poor and needy. We have defiled God’s good creation and have failed to care for the poor and needy. We have been blessed beyond measure, and now much is required of us. Will we be faithful and prudent managers, at work when our Master comes?

Ambrose of Milan wrote, “The world has been created for everyone’s use, but you few rich are trying to keep it for yourselves. For not merely the possession of the earth, but the very sky, the air, and the sea are claimed for the use of the rich few…. The earth belongs to all, not just to the rich.” (Sleeth, 2008)

Praise be you, my Lord through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility. St. Francis of Assisi, Canticle of the Creatures.

Our UCC website states, “We are a church where Jesus the healer meets Jesus the revolutionary, and where together, we grow a just and peaceful world.” This resolution is one small step that UCC congregations can take toward putting a “just and peaceful world” into practice. The UCC General Synod has previously approved resolutions demonstrating concern for eco-justice, environmental racism, sustainability, clean air and water, and international environmental policy. These include related resolutions, “ON MAKING UCC CHURCH BUILDINGS MORE CARBON NEUTRAL” (GS 29, 2013) and “TRANSITION FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY” (GS 30, 2015).

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS Styrofoam (a registered trademark by Dow Chemical so “Styrofoam” will be replaced with plastic foam) is made of expanded polystyrene foam, and

WHEREAS polystyrene is made by linking styrene molecules into a polymer (American Chemistry Council) and “polymer” is defined by Merriam-Webster as a chemical compound or mixture of compounds that is formed by combination of smaller molecules and consists basically of repeating structural units, and
WHEREAS plastic foam is used in many applications, including food service (Clean Water Action, 2011), and

WHEREAS it takes 500 years for plastic foam to decompose (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS landfill contents are 25-30% plastic, which includes plastic foam (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS styrene and benzene are used in the production of plastic foam, and styrene is a probable carcinogen in humans (Aarhus University, 2018), and benzene is a known carcinogen in humans (American Cancer Society), and

WHEREAS plastic foam containers leach styrene when they come into contact with warm food or drink, alcohol, oils, and acidic foods such as fruit juice (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS microwaving food in plastic foam containers increases styrene leaching into food and is considered a health risk (Earth Resource Foundation), and

WHEREAS in 1986 the EPA listed polystyrene manufacturing as the 5th largest hazardous waste contributor in the United States and polystyrene is manufactured with petroleum which is non-sustaining and heavily polluting (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS the United Nations Environment Programs estimated in 2006 that 46,000 pieces of plastic, including plastic foam, float in every square mile of ocean (Sims, 2016), because plastic foam is lightweight and floats readily so it travels easily down storm drains and runs off into waterways, and

WHEREAS plastic from urban runoff is the primary source of plastic ocean debris world-wide (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS as plastics enter the waterways and oceans, they break down into smaller and smaller pieces, which are then ingested by marine life, causing harm or death, which has potential impacts on seafood fish populations (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2018), and

WHEREAS in 2010 the United Nations estimated that 37% of the global population lives along the coastline (United Nations Goal 14, 2016), and

WHEREAS seafood makes up 90% of protein in the diet of persons living in some parts of the world (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2018), and

WHEREAS a study of beach debris in Orange County, California found plastic foam to be the second most abundant form of beach debris (Moore et al. 1998), and

WHEREAS a study of microplastics in the Chesapeake Bay found microplastics in 98% of samples (Marine Debris Program, 2018)
WHEREAS 100% of human fatty tissues sampled in 1972, 1976, and 1982 contained levels of styrene. A 1988 survey found levels of styrene in fatty tissue to be 8 to 350 nanograms of styrene per gram of tissue (ng/g). 350 ng/g is 1/3 the level of styrene that is toxic to nerves or nervous tissue (Sims, 2016), and

WHEREAS research on the effects of plastic pollution and chemical effects on the food web and human health is currently inadequate (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2018), and

WHEREAS non-plastic foam food packaging products are available online at the following websites (this list is NOT all-inclusive – there are others, and users are encouraged and expected to do their own research for quality and price):

https://www.goodstartpackaging.com/
http://letsgogreen.biz/, and

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ is committed to Environmental Justice, and the third of the “3 Great Loves” initiative is Love of Creation,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty Second General Synod encourages Conferences, Associations, Congregations, and individuals to avoid the use of plastic foam in food packaging and other activities within their church and church-related facilities, and

Be it further resolved that Thirty Second General Synod encourages Conferences, Associations and Congregations to educate their members about plastic foam and that they encourage the use of alternatives such as paper products or, better yet, ceramic or other dishwasher-safe products.

FUNDING
The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION
The officers of the church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

WORKS CITED


