

## **Single-use plastic water bottles**

Origin: North Bay and area Mission Cluster

*We believe God is calling the Canadian Shield Region communities of faith to each establish a policy stating that they choose NOT to use single-use plastic water bottles in their churches, and to incorporate this into their rental policies, a request asking others using their buildings to abide by this same agreement.*

**The Creation** is a gift from God which is entrusted to our care. "To have dominion," (Gen 1:28) is to be called into partnership with God, receiving the duty and the privilege to foster the well-being of the whole Earth community. As covenant partners, we are to care for the Earth with the same love with which God cares for all of life.

Care of the earth is multi-faceted and inter-connected. Water is a fundamental element of Creation and a prerequisite for life. This singular element of life has become entwined with the production of plastic and the fossil fuel industry which is directly linked to personal health and well-being, environmental degradation and climate change.

At its 39<sup>th</sup> General Council (2006), our Church responded affirmatively to a policy document entitled, "Water: Life before Profit," in which it states, "... Water is a sacred gift that connects all of life. ... Its value to the common good must take priority over commercial interests. Privatization turns a common good into a commodity, depriving those who cannot pay and further threatening local ecosystems."

### **Key aspects of concern related to single-use plastic water bottles include:**

#### **1. Bottled water leads to climate change.**

The bottled water industry requires massive amounts of fossil fuels to manufacture, refrigerate and transport their products. For example, according to the *Bow River Keeper*, a citizen's group that protects Alberta's Bow River watershed, in order to produce 1 kg of FIJI brand water, it takes 26.88 kgs of water, 0.849 kgs of fossil fuel and there is a production of 562 gms of greenhouse gases. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the production of plastic products account for an estimated 8% of global oil production. They also estimate that 5oz of carbon dioxide are emitted for every ounce of Polyethylene Terephthalate produced (also known as PET) that is the plastic most commonly used to make water bottles.

#### **2. Bottled water is not safer than tap water.**

In order to persuade people to spend 200 - 3,000 times what they spend on tap water, bottled water companies advertise their products as a "safer and healthier alternative." Water bottling plants are inspected on average once every three years, according to the Polaris Institute, an Ottawa-based research organization. Tap water regulation, on the

other hand, is far more stringent. Municipal tap water is tested continuously—both during and after treatment.

**3. Our landfills cannot support bottled water.**

Our landfills cannot handle the volume of garbage that is created by empty water bottles. Canadian municipalities are dealing with a waste management crisis. In some large urban centres as few as 50% of water bottles are being recycled. In some communities the volume of water bottles ending up in landfills can be as high as 80%.

**4. Bottled water leads to water shortages.**

Withdrawing water from underground aquifers and springs, drains natural water reserves, placing whole watersheds under threat. Furthermore, manufacturing water bottles also requires huge amounts of water. It takes three to five litres of water to produce every one-litre plastic bottle.

**5. Plastic pollution is a hazard to public health and the human body.**

Chemicals such as phthalates (DEHP) and Bisphenol-A (BPA)—an estrogen-imitating chemical used to produce reusable plastic, leach from some plastics containing water are harmful to human health. Especially when the contents within the plastic bottle are there for a long period of time, or are heated even by sunlight, there is a greater chance of chemical contamination.

**6. Water is a human right.**

Water should be guaranteed for all people regardless of their ability to pay and no matter where they live in the world. No individual, group or company should be able to control it or expropriate it for profit. The bottled water industry has worked hard to undermine our faith in public water. Canada has one of the best public drinking systems in the world. Instead of high-priced bottled water, we need a National Water Policy that would further improve the public water system, enshrine the human right to water in legislation, and ensure clean drinking water standards for all communities across the country with the first priority being reserve communities who have been chronically under-served.

*Therefore, it is proposed that the Canadian Shield Regional Council endorse this no single-use water bottle policy and that the Chair of the Council write letters to all individual communities of faith within the Region asking each to establish their own policy stating that they choose NOT to use single-use plastic water bottles in their churches, and to incorporate into their rental policies, a request that others using their buildings abide by this same agreement.*

**Source acknowledgements:**

1. Council of Canadians. "Unbottle it," A guide on how to obtain a bottled water ban in your community, undated.
2. Earthday Network. "Plastic Pollution Primer and ActionToolkit," 2018 at [www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org)
3. UCC. "WATER: Life Before Profit," Policy decisions from the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council, August 2006.
4. UCC. "Bottled Water: Think Before You Drink," in MANDATE, February 2007, p3-5.