

St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
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Environmental Justice Mission Brief

St. Aidan's is committed to stewardship of the environment and addressing environmental justice issues. We do not claim authority or special expertise in these matters. We are still trying to hear God's voice in our mission. Yet, we feel called to increase and spread our passion for the stewardship of God's creation.

We want to call others into dialogue and ministry with St. Aidan's to act upon our environmental justice concerns. We are a community that fosters open dialogue and a place where all perspectives are listened to with respect.

Our series of handouts aim to provide information, resources and action ideas regarding current environmental justice issues.

Plastic Pollution in the Great Lakes

The following is a summary of a July 16, 2018 article from *Treehugger*,¹ written by Katherine Martinko entitled, *The Great Lakes contain as much plastic as the oceans*.

Martinko writes that plastic is a problem for the Great Lakes. She cites a 2016 report that 9,887 metric tons of plastic enter the Great Lakes annually.

Chelsea Rachman, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Toronto (UofT), told Martinko that the Great Lakes are enclosed systems and don't get flushed out in the way that ocean currents can move ocean contaminants.

Rachman states that almost all the fish sampled from Lakes Superior, Ontario and Erie were contaminated with microplastic particles. Alliance for the Great Lakes indicates all five Great Lakes are contaminated with microplastics.² According to a UofT Scarborough report, plastics enter the Great Lakes from storm runoff through rivers and streams, wastewater treatment plants, litter blown or thrown into the water system, agricultural runoff, and debris from boating and fishing industries and leisure activities.

¹ <https://www.treehugger.com/clean-water/great-lakes-contain-much-plastic-oceans.html>

² <https://greatlakes.org/great-lakes-plastic-pollution-fighting-for-plastic-free-water/>

Martinko writes that Rachman's research found microplastic particles from tire dust, clothing fibers, glitter, plastic bottles and facial wash microbeads. These microplastics are eaten by fish and also enter into drinking water.

Researching microplastic contaminants in fresh waters is a new focus of environmental study. It can be expected that it will become an increasingly important area of research to the 40 million people who get their water from the Great Lakes.

Martinko's article emphasizes the need for communities and municipalities to take strong action to require manufacturing companies to make all plastic products fully recyclable without waste and to require better reusable or biodegradable options.

For further exploration:

1. Bible reflection: *Ezekiel 36:25-26*

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

What does it mean to have a new heart and a new spirit? What does that look/feel like? Being made in the image of God, how do we, with God, also be sprinklers of clean water? What parts of life does that affect?

2. Please see our source for this brief, Katherine Martinko's 7-16-18 *Treehugger* article, for a more detailed conversation.

<https://www.treehugger.com/clean-water/great-lakes-contain-much-plastic-oceans.html>

3. For more information about microbeads in our treated drinking water, check out Alliance for the Great Lakes, at:
<https://greatlakes.org/great-lakes-plastic-pollution-fighting-for-plastic-free-water/>
This organization has many initiatives to protect the Great Lakes and suggestions for getting involved and taking personal and common action.

4. One of the programs offered through Alliance for the Great Lakes is Adopt-a-Beach. Every year 15,000 volunteers remove 18 tons of garbage from beaches (85% of the garbage is plastic). You might join their effort – or gather a group on your own and clean a beach.

5. For great suggestions about how you can reduce/eliminate microbead pollution and check the products you use for microbead ingredients go to <http://www.beatthemicrobead.org>