

Christian Principles for a Healthy Body and Spirit

These principles were drafted as a collaborative effort of the National Council of Churches in consultation with its member denominations, Earth Ministry, Voices for Earth Justice, Massachusetts Council of Churches, Maine Council of Churches, and Minnesota Council of Churches.

We are blessed to be created in the image of God and to receive nourishment from the bounty of God's Creation (Genesis 1:26-27). As part of Creation, our bodies are also temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19), and caring for our bodies becomes one way to honor the Creator.

After creating the Earth, God said it was good (Genesis 1:25). Yet, our modern lifestyles and the choices we make in our daily lives can muddy the waters (Ezekiel 34:18), threatening the health of the whole body of Christ. Every day our bodies are exposed to air pollution from vehicles, pollution from factories and toxic waste sites, water pollution from industrial wastes or spills, and from chemicals in household products that leach into our water, release into the air, or enter our bodies through our skin. Some of the products around our homes that include chemicals that are known or suspected to be toxic include household cleaners, children's clothing, personal care products, plastic food and drink materials, textiles, and children's toys. Scientific evidence raises concern about the link between exposure to toxic chemicals and high rates of some cancers, learning and development disabilities, infertility, and other serious health problems.

Exposures to toxic chemicals and toxins can occur in our schools, in our churches, in our homes, and in our work places. From the creation stories through the apostles' accounts of Christ, the lessons of our faith provide a moral and spiritual foundation for us to care for our personal health, the health of our children, the health of our larger community of vulnerable populations, and the health of God's entire Creation. The following principles statement, based on Christian teachings, strive to make God's Earth a safer place for all of us to live, work, and play.

Protecting Creation

We were made in the image of God and placed in the garden to serve and protect the creation (Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:15). We must honor this responsibility and recognize that all creatures of God are expressions of God's presence and glory. Pollution in our water, air, and land jeopardize the health of God's Creation. By protecting these gifts from God, we also recognize our interdependence with the rest of Creation.

In order to protect our health and the health of all Creation, we need government policies that:

- Classify toxic chemicals that destroy or sicken God's creatures
- Identify and work to replace chemicals known to persist in the environment or increase in severity as they move up the food chain (bioaccumulate).

Healthy Bodies, Healthy Selves

The Creator, the Great Physician, cares for the health and well being of all people (Genesis 15:26; Matthew 8:14-17). God provided us with air, water, and land free from chemicals that may harm our bodily temples so that we can strive for healthy and abundant lives (Ezekiel 47:12). Through mindful individual decisions that put human health and the health of Creation first, and sound government policy that seeks first to protect, we can treat our bodies as temples to the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19).

We encourage government policies that:

- Require companies and government regulatory agencies to inform people about the chemicals that are in consumer products through "right to know" clauses and a published chemical database so that individuals and state regulatory agencies can make sound decisions for their families, their congregations, and their communities.

- Replace known toxic chemicals, especially chemicals with high production volume, when safer alternatives exist.
- Invest in research to find safer alternatives when an option is not available.

Justice for Vulnerable Populations

Our faith leads us to walk with and seek justice for the poor and the vulnerable from the prophets Moses and Isaiah to the teachings of Jesus (Leviticus 19: 9-10; Isaiah 58: 6-12; Matthew 8:1-3; Matthew 18:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). We are all children of God (John 1:11-13) and share the suffering and the joys with all of Earth's members and make them our own.

Each newborn baby now carries a body burden of chemicals that increases over a lifetime. Children, women, the elderly, low-income communities, communities of color, and people with weakened immune systems are also disproportionately vulnerable to these chemicals. Jesus has a special love for children (Matthew 19:14), and we need to ensure that our children can grow in healthy, toxic-free environments. Parents should be able buy products with the ease of mind that they are not exposing their children to unwanted chemicals.

Likewise, communities of color bear a double burden. In addition to products with contaminants marketed to us all, there are also products specifically marketed to racial and ethnic groups that increase their exposure to chemicals of concern. Industrial manufacturing plants and toxic waste sites are also more likely to locate in or near communities of color and low-income communities, contributing a greater burden of toxic trespass. This can lead to higher incidences of cancer rates, heart disease, and developmental disorders among people of color. To "love our neighbor as ourselves" (Leviticus 19:17) we cannot allow any of God's children to carry an unequal burden of contaminants in their bodily temples.

We call on government officials to:

- Create a classification system that eliminates exposure to known toxic chemicals in umbilical cord blood, and children at levels recommended by scientific review. These chemicals should be replaced with safer alternatives when possible or designate funds to research safer alternatives. This system should also identify less toxic and non-toxic options, particularly for pregnant women, children, communities of color, the elderly, and low-income communities.
- Ensure US government agencies and manufacturers test new chemicals before they are released into the market, and to test current chemicals that are suspected to be toxic already on the market as soon as possible.
- Incorporate biomonitoring programs that are conducted with community participation and consultation in order to evaluate exposure to chemicals by vulnerable populations.

Sustainability

As Christians, we hold out promise of a hope-filled world for our children to inherit. This world includes healthy, sustainable ecosystems and communities. God gave us many gifts to ensure the survival for all of Creation. With mindful living that includes healthy choices and sound government policies, future generations and all of God's creation can thrive.

To accomplish this we call for governmental policies that:

- Promote incentives for the development of a green economy that will allow all of God's creation to flourish, and bring jobs and justice for communities that currently suffer from polluting industries located in their vicinity.
- Promote the development of a green chemistry industry that produces alternatives for the most hazardous chemicals in our homes, our congregations, our schools, and our work places.

By committing ourselves to these principles we can work to heal our broken relationships with the Creation and with each other, strengthening and renewing the entire body of Christ.