

The logo for the Mercy Earth Challenge. It features the words "MERCY", "EARTH", and "CHALLENGE" stacked vertically in a bold, green, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a colorful, stylized flower or sunburst icon with five petals in shades of green, yellow, orange, blue, and purple. A small globe is integrated into the center of the flower. The logo is set against a white background with green triangular accents in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

# MERCY EARTH CHALLENGE

## Plastic Pollution is More than Ocean Litter

Increased plastic pollution is turning out to be one of the fall-outs from the coronavirus pandemic.

People who study these things date the problem of plastic pollution to the late 1950s, with a significant increase in the 1990s. Now they wonder if 2020-21 will mark another bump with the use of disposable face masks, gloves and gowns; bottled water and hand sanitizer; and take-out containers and plastic packaging for home-delivered groceries all on the rise.

While some of this increased use of plastic may be necessary for health and safety during the pandemic, we can look for opportunities to reduce plastic waste where we can and plan for doing even more once it's safe to do so.

Many of us are well aware of the harms of [plastic pollution in our oceans](#). We've seen photos or videos of animals, fish or birds entangled in plastic debris, and heard tragic stories of deaths by starvation as marine life mistake bits of plastic as food. We've learned of the huge garbage patch in the northern Pacific Ocean.

What we might not have considered is the [harm to human health](#) from the full life cycle of plastics. This starts with the extraction of fossil fuels that are the building blocks of plastics and continues through the manufacturing process, incineration of plastics and exposure through the food chain and release of toxins in packaging. Additionally, waste pickers in poor nations risk their health during covid-19 to make a little money cleaning up other

people's trash and keeping their communities free from litter. This [four-minute video](#) from the Story of Stuff series illustrates the impacts of plastics manufacturing on small towns in Texas. (You can use the settings to add Spanish sub-titles.)

### What can we do?

- Consider tips for plastics alternatives and re-use of plastics in our [Plastics: Beyond Convenience calendar](#). Many of the ideas come from Mercy sisters, associates and friends.
- Get busy making eco-bricks from two-liter plastic bottles. A student at Holy Cross School in the Philippines explains how in the article and photo below. The school has used the finished products to edge their gardens and to build a waiting shed for students. Others have used eco-bricks to create furniture – and In Thailand, they have been used to construct a whole school!
- Advocate for bans on or small fees for plastic bags, straws and plastic foam-based take-out containers in your community.
- Follow efforts to implement a [global agreement on plastics](#) through the United Nations Environment Assembly this year and next.

Are you ready to commit to reducing plastic throughout 2021? Email us at [justice@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:justice@sistersofmercy.org) to tell us what specific change(s) you will make in your lifestyle and/or how you will advocate for systemic change. We will ask again at the end of this month, and share later this year all the ways that Mercy is embracing this commitment.

# How to Reinvent, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Plastics (The Holycrossian Way)

By Kylene Danielle, Grade 12 student

We can't deny the fact that most plastics are single use. The more we use plastics, the more we add to the growing amount of trash and pollution on the planet. Plastic is a major problem in our community because it takes a hundred years to decompose and we have been producing plastic for a long time.

As a Holycrossian, we employ the making of eco-bricks as a way of reducing plastics on our campus, Holy Cross High School, Kolambugan, Lanao del Norte, Mindanao, Philippines. An eco-brick is an affordable way of reducing plastics around us. It is done by recycling an old plastic empty bottle and gathering plastic wrappers. Firstly, we clean and dry the empty plastic bottle and plastic wrappers. Second, we cut the plastic wrappers into tiny pieces so that it will be much easier for us to stuff them into the bottle. Third, we gather the pieces we have cut and, with a stick, we push the pieces of plastic into the plastic bottle, making sure there are no air spaces in between the plastic pieces. Lastly, after stuffing the bottle with plastic wrappers, we shut the bottle tightly so that moisture won't build up inside the bottle. Doing these steps, we have an eco-brick that will save mother earth. It's not much but a little goes a long way especially when we help one another in restoring our planet earth. As Helen Keller quote "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

