

The logo for the Mercy Earth Challenge 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 six petals in shades of green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and blue. The background of the page is white with green diagonal accents in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

MERCY EARTH CHALLENGE

Recycling is Not the Answer

Many of us in the U.S. are diligent about separating our trash, paper, plastics and cans and putting anything our municipal government tells us can be recycled into the proper blue bin.

But did you know that only 9 percent of all the plastic ever made has actually been recycled? For awhile, China was accepting plastics from the US but now bans the imports of our trash. That means that much of our plastic is being shipped to even poorer countries -- and making them deal with it. [This 4-minute video](#) dispels the recycling myth. (You can use the settings function for Spanish subtitles.)

It's clear that reducing plastic pollution requires actually reducing use of plastic, from manufacturing and corporate packaging to individual consumer decisions.

Mercy Sister Anne Chester shares with us (below) her attempts to educate others at the retirement center in Auburn, California, and to change some of the practices there. She shows that trying things out requires patience, and this time of pandemic can temporarily set us back in our efforts.

Some actions to consider to supplement the tips in our [January calendar](#):

- If you regularly order home-delivered products from a certain store or company, let them know that you want less packaging
- Suzanne Gallagher of the Mercy Justice Team swears by these [laundry strips](#) as an alternative to laundry detergent in plastic bottles. You can find other plastic alternative products [here](#) and [here](#).

- Urge President-elect Biden to [take 8 executive actions](#) to reduce plastic pollution when he takes office.

Sister Anne Chester, who lives at the Mercy retirement center in Auburn, CA, shares her struggles with the problem of plastics.

About a year ago, I made an attempt to educate myself and, hopefully, some of sisters I live with, regarding single-use plastics. I found the response encouraging but was a bit surprised at how difficult it is to bring about change in a large convent which operates somewhat like an institution.

I met with our department managers, all of whom were supportive. Kelly Lionello, our dietary manager, had done a lot of research some time back and tried to implement many of the recommendations. She is especially careful to order compostable tableware.

At that time she was doing ordering supplies for the whole house; now others are doing some of it and have abandoned some of the best practices because of the extra work involved or because an individual insists on a particular brand of laundry soap, etc.

I even ordered bamboo toothbrushes for everyone (learning: the design and feel of the toothbrush I got is hard to handle and has an unpleasant feel in the mouth – not recommended!)

The pandemic has upended a lot of practices we had started. Since we are a retirement center and have been under strict lockdown, sanitation became the primary concern. Individual packaging has taken over, with a lot of paper and plastic going into the waste bin. My heart bleeds every time I discard my lunch plate! I have hopes, however, that we will be able to return to better practices soon.