



## **SUSTAINABLE SHOPPING**

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* reminds us of “the great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers.” He references Pope Benedict’s statements on this same issue: “Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act.”

We invite you to consider alternative gift giving, the use and purchase of electronics, supporting local businesses, and the effects of our clothing industry on the environment.

### **Alternative Gift Giving**

Instead of buying gifts from chain stores for the special people in your life, consider giving donations in someone’s name or buying something from a fair trade organization.

Fair trade is an arrangement designed to help producers in developing countries achieve sustainable and equitable trade relationships as well as improved social and environmental standards. Organizations such as SERRV, Ten Thousand Villages, Equal Exchange and Marketplace India have a wide variety of gift items including food and clothing.

Alternative gift giving could also be doing a service for another or offering to do something with the other person.

### **Electronics**

Electronic devices and the accompanying batteries, chargers, modems and other equipment use minerals and fossil fuels that often damage the environment, from production through ultimate disposal.

The [8-minute Story of Electronics video](#) calls this life cycle “designed for the dump.”

For most of us, avoiding electronics in our daily lives is impossible. So how can we act on our Critical Concern “to reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life...?”

Some possible steps:

- Take an inventory of how many electronic devices you own, both personally and shared. Why were these purchased? What do you need vs. what do you want? What happened to the used or broken electronic devices you no longer own? Can you delay replacing current devices?
- [Check for certified safe take-back and recycling options](#) near you

## **Buy Local**

When we patronize locally owned restaurants and businesses, more money and jobs stay in the community. As a customer, you also may have more influence on the business’ environmental practices, such as suggesting reducing plastic in take-out containers or packaging of goods.

Purchasing locally instead of purchasing online will result in less waste in the packaging and reduce the use of fossil fuels in transporting goods to your residence.

---

## For Prayer and Reflection

Think globally, act locally is an often-heard phrase. What does it mean in your life? We are inextricably united in a global world, a global environment, and a global economy. Many of the resources needed for technological society come from other parts of the globe. Yet, this does not absolve us from considering how our actions affect both the people in our local community as well as our global world.

Do I know what restaurants and businesses are owned locally?

How do I make my purchasing decisions? What goes into my decision to buy locally or to purchase online either locally or not?

Am I willing to be inconvenienced?

## **Clothing**

The clothing we wear, especially the [demand for “fast fashion,”](#) has an unseen price on the lives of the workers and on the environment. In the effort to produce clothes more cheaply and quickly, companies often turn to workers in underdeveloped nations, where they are paid unfair wages and may work in slave-like conditions that contribute to the cycle of poverty. In garment factories, children may be put to work at any or all stages of the supply chain, from the production of cotton, to the yarn spinning, to the final cuts and sewing stages. The 2018 Stop Child Labor Coalition estimated that there are nearly 200 million child laborers throughout the world. Clothing production also creates a significant environmental impact, such as the massive amount of waste created as newer fashion trends push older ones into landfills.

The clothing industry is the second largest consumer of water in the world after agriculture. It takes about 1800 gallons of water to produce one pair of jeans. This is roughly the average amount of water used by an American in 20 days. Dyes and harmful chemicals used in manufacturing are often toxic, not only for the workers but also for the environment, as the production waste is frequently discharged into the surrounding communities and area waterways, compromising sanitation and creating health risks to those living nearby.

While donating used clothing is better than putting it in the trash, most donated clothing ends up in the landfill, is sold to textile recyclers or is sent overseas. Recycling clothing for insulation, carpet padding, yarn, or paper, does reduce greenhouse emissions. But clothing sent overseas to be sold cheaply in poor countries has the effect of depressing and harming the local markets for clothing. You can read more [here](#) about what happens to your donated clothing.

How can we shop to promote the use of sustainable and ethical practices in the manufacturing of the clothes we wear and protect the people and places that produce them?

- Buy Fair Trade, Ethically Sourced, or Organic. Many companies have eco-conscious product lines and sustainability reports. Clothing made from synthetic fibers such as acrylic, nylon, polyester, coated finishes and the stretchy parts of clothing are made from oil.
- Buy secondhand clothing. If everyone bought one secondhand item of clothing a year instead of new clothing, this would be the equivalent of taking ½ million cars off the road.
- Keep your clothing longer. The average American now generates 82 pounds of textile waste each year. Even keeping clothing for 9 months longer reduces the carbon footprint for that garment by 30%. This is what really happens to your used clothing donations

Thank you for joining us in learning more about sustainable shopping. If you've missed any segments of this four-part series, or of previous series in the Mercy Earth Challenge, you will find all the resources [here](#).

We look forward to engaging with you again in January as we commit to reducing our use of disposable plastics in the new year.

Sisters of Mercy Justice Team