This is a leader's guide for a stand-alone event to explore waste and consumerism with your church. In this pack you'll find everything you need to organise a brilliant Rubbish Event. We recommend that, however big or small your event, you include four key ingredients: food, thought, discussion and action. With these four together, you'll be able to grapple with the big issues and bring it right down to earth with actions people can take now.

Please email us at campaigns@tearfund.org at least two weeks before your event so we can send you enough Rubbish Campaign cards for everyone to sign.

Thank you for supporting the campaign and inviting others to get on board too!

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Our world has a rubbish problem – and it’s hitting people living in poverty the hardest. As Christians, we are called to love our global neighbours and care for creation.

Today, 2 billion people in the world’s poorest countries are living and working among piles of waste, because they don’t have their rubbish collected. This creates a breeding ground for disease-carrying rats, flies and mosquitoes. Burning rubbish to get rid of it pollutes the air, causing breathing problems. Waste also clogs waterways, which then causes floods when it rains. Each day the waste mountains are growing, and every year up to a million people die due to pollution caused by waste.

Big global companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever are making things worse by selling billions of products in single-use plastic packaging in countries where waste isn’t collected. So their packaging is used only ONCE before it’s thrown away – and these companies know that communities will have no choice but to burn it or live among it. Meanwhile, in the UK, it’s estimated that we throw away two double-decker busloads of plastic every 30 seconds.

And there’s something going on behind this big rubbish problem: it’s the big idea of ‘consumerism’.

Consumerism is so obviously present in the culture around us. Advertisers tell us that the things we buy and own shape who we are and that these things are where we can find happiness and belonging. At the same time, we buy these products totally out of context – with no regard for, and no knowledge of, the people who made them or the places they’re from.
As Christians, we know we find our identity first and foremost in Jesus Christ. We are born again into his family and are called to love both our local and global neighbours. Both these callings can be hard to live out in a society steeped in consumerism.

In her book *Just living*, Dr Ruth Valerio, Tearfund’s Global Advocacy and Influencing Director, writes: ‘If we want to think through how to live well as Christians in today’s culture, then we simply have to get to grips with consumerism.’

Holding a Rubbish Event will give your church, home group or friends a chance to discuss these big and complex issues in a fun and engaging way over a meal. You'll consider what's going on and how each of us – individually and together – can take action to tackle this big rubbish problem.

‘IF WE WANT TO THINK THROUGH HOW TO LIVE WELL AS CHRISTIANS IN TODAY’S CULTURE, THEN WE SIMPLY HAVE TO GET TO GRIPS WITH CONSUMERISM’
EVENT OVERVIEW

The detailed plan is in the next section, but here’s an overview of how an event lasting an hour-and-a-half might run:

- Guests arrive and add their food to the buffet table (if you’re doing a bring & share meal).
- As people arrive and mingle, have the conversation starters (see page 18) on the tables for people to begin discussing. If you’re in a small group, use them to guide conversation. (5 mins)
- The host welcomes everyone, introduces the topic and says grace. (5 mins)
- Guests eat their main course and continue to work through the conversation starters. (20 mins)
- If your event is all-age, you could get the children doing their activity as soon as they’ve eaten, while adults are discussing the questions. You’ll need someone to lead the children’s activity.
- After people have eaten, share with the whole group what each group has been discussing, and then introduce and watch the film. (20 mins)
- After the film, guests eat dessert and discuss some questions in groups (see page 19). The host then gets people to share what they’ve been talking about. (30 mins)
- The host invites people to sign Tearfund's Rubbish Campaign cards as part of their response, and then prays. (10 mins)
- End the evening by thanking those who have helped and close in prayer.
LOGISTICS

• **Agree a date and venue** with your church, home group or others who will help you. Try to avoid clashes with other church events. Consider asking your church leader if you could do a Rubbish Event instead of home groups one week, or as a shared lunch after church.

• **Share out the jobs.** You could break the work into five roles: food coordinator, on-the-night host, table leaders, video & PowerPoint operator, and children’s activity leader – and you’ll also need people to help set up and pack away.

• ** Invite people!** The best way to promote an event is to invite people face to face, so talk to people before and after church, ask your church leader if you can give an announcement, and use other channels such as church bulletins, email and Facebook. Make sure you explain the food challenge (see below) when inviting people!

FOOD

This will take a bit of organising, but will be worth the effort and get people thinking about plastic pollution before they even arrive! We’ve suggested two options here, but choose what works best for your group, and either way make sure people bring tubs for leftovers!

OPTION 1: BRING AND SHARE

• Ask guests to bring a dish to share. If everyone brings enough to feed themselves, you should have enough when everything gets shared out.

• You may want to agree who brings savoury/sweet, so you have a good balance, and you may also need to consider food hygiene rules if people are bringing hot food.

• The challenge is to try to bring something that is free of single-use plastic, or at least uses less packaging than normal. People might find this difficult if they’ve not thought about it before, but that’s part of the fun! Encourage them to try, but make sure it doesn’t feel too strict or off-putting. This should be a fun addition to the event, not a burden!
Here are some tips to help people prepare their food:

• If you have a zero-waste shop in your town, you could buy pasta, rice, lentils, dried fruit, chocolate buttons, etc there. (We’ve added some links to find your nearest one on page 17.)
• Visit local markets and greengrocers for loose fruit and veg, or buy loose vegetables from your supermarket.
• Ask the deli counter if they can put cheese and other items into a tub or jar you’ve brought rather than wrapping them up. Lots of supermarkets do this now!
• Visit a bakery or ask in the supermarket for a loaf without plastic packaging.
• Baking or making at home often reduces the amount of plastic needed, so reserve some time the day before to get creative in the kitchen and prepare your dish.

OPTION 2: PREPARE A MEAL FOR GUESTS

• If you don’t think bring and share works for your group, why not take on the challenge with your organising team and prepare a meal that doesn’t use any single-use plastic (or use less than normal!)?
• Making pizzas from scratch, a daal, or soup and bread can all work well. When one supporter tried this at their university, they made zero-waste bean burritos for everyone. Get creative and see what you can do!
RESOURCES

- At least two weeks before the event, contact us at campaigns@tearfund.org with a rough idea of numbers and we will send you enough Rubbish Campaign cards for your guests to use.
- You’ll also need to make sure you can show the film and PowerPoint. Both can be downloaded in advance from www.tearfund.org/action
- Print out enough conversation starters and discussion questions for all the tables. (See pages 18 and 19.)
- If you are running a children’s activity, make sure you have enough resources so all the children can take part.

Now you’ve read this overview, hopefully you’re excited about organising your event. So get your team together, and dive into the detailed leader’s guide below!

1. Have you ever thought about plastic pollution in theological terms? What Bible verses come to mind when thinking about this issue?
2. If you took part in the food challenge, how easy did you find it to go plastic-free?
3. Are there any brands whose products you would secretly love to own? Why?
Here are some more detailed ideas and a suggested script for your event, but please don’t feel constrained by them. Feel free to adapt this pack to work best for your group.

**INTRODUCTION**

Once everyone’s arrived and you’re ready to eat, the host should introduce the topic and let people know a bit more about the evening. Here’s a suggested welcome talk you could use alongside the PowerPoint:

**SLIDE 1:**

*Hello, everyone: thank you for joining us.*

*Explain who you are and why you organised the event.*

*Plastic is all around us, isn’t it? In the media, in our shopping trolleys and in our recycling bins. You can’t go very long without another TV show that mentions rubbish, or another news article popping up. It’s a big deal – and we’re probably all aware that the amount we’re throwing away is a big problem.*
So, today we want to unpack why it's such a big problem – not just for our oceans but also for people living in poverty. And we want to invite you to think about how we, as Christians, can steward creation more carefully and love our neighbours who are impacted the most by waste.

To do that, we’ve got conversation starters on the tables and some other questions for you to discuss later. We’ve also got a film of Dr Ruth Valerio, from Tearfund, talking about this rubbish problem and how we might respond.

Finally, thank you so much to everyone who prepared our minimal-waste meal.

[Thank individuals by name, and explain the food challenge for those who weren't aware of it.]

So, in a moment, please do go and help yourself to food and then get stuck into the conversation starters with the people on your table. Before you do, I’ll say grace.

[Thank God for the food, the people and places that it came from, and the group of people you get to share it with at the event.]

CHILDREN’S ACTIVITY

If your event is all-age, you could get the children doing their activities after eating, while adults move on to the next section of the event. We suggest using the 'How long till it's gone?' game from the All-age Rubbish Activities for your Church guide (page 6) and making waste sculptures (page 5). You’ll need someone to lead the children’s activity.

AFTER DINNER

Ask people to share with the whole group what they have been discussing, and then introduce and start the film. Here’s a suggested script for this section:

Hello again, everyone. I hope you enjoyed your meal and had some good conversations on your tables. Did anyone come up with a rubbish joke? What did people say for the question: Is plastic fantastic?
Hopefully, someone will say that plastic can be valuable, such as in medicine or to reduce food waste. Affirm what they say: plastic isn’t inherently bad. Tonight we’re grateful for Tupperware, plastic on projectors/TVs and so on, but the way we’ve misused and overused it has damaged creation.

SLIDE 2:

Thanks for sharing! Tonight we’re thinking about a rubbish problem.

We’re all probably aware that plastic pollution is a big problem. In the UK we throw away enough plastic to fill two double-decker buses every 30 seconds!

But plastic isn’t only a problem here: it’s actually hitting the poorest people the hardest. Today, 2 billion people in the world’s poorest countries are living and working among piles of waste, because they don’t have their rubbish collected. That’s one in four people around the world.

SLIDE 3:

For these people, waste affects their lives in many ways: polluting their drinking water and causing sickness. (Rats, flies and mosquitoes love waste-filled places.) Waterways get clogged with waste, which causes flooding when it rains. Open burning of waste fills the air with toxic fumes, which causes respiratory problems. All of this results in up to a million deaths a year: that’s one person dying every 30 seconds because of rubbish. And the waste mountains are growing each day.

Did you know that companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever – companies we all know well – also sell billions of products in single-use plastic packaging in poorer countries where waste isn’t collected? So their packaging is used only ONCE before it’s thrown away and they know people will have no choice but to burn their rubbish, discard it in waterways or live among it.

Tonight we want to call on these companies to take responsibility for their rubbish – but we also want to spend some time thinking how we got into this mess in the first place. What is it that’s driving this explosion of waste around the world? And how should we respond as Christians?

To help us do that, we’re going to watch a film with Ruth Valerio from Tearfund, and afterwards we’ll discuss the issues it raises, around our tables and then all together.
AFTER THE FILM

This is the key bit to the evening, as it will allow people to think about how they respond to consumerism – and it’s also time for dessert! Allow plenty of time for this part: we suggest half an hour.

Suggested script for the host:

Lots to think about there!

I’m going to hand out some more discussion questions now, to help your table think through everything we’re learning. And while I do that, please do go and help yourself to dessert.

[The second set of discussion questions are on page 19.]

ENDING DISCUSSIONS

This is about bringing conversations together, getting people to share and then committing to personal actions. It will also be a chance to encourage them to speak up using the campaign cards (so make sure you put enough cards and pens on all the tables for everyone to sign one).

Suggested script for this part:

It sounds like you were having some great discussions!

It would be great to have just a small insight into your conversations. Would anyone like to share very briefly one thing that came up in your discussions?

[Don’t feel that you need to respond to what people say – just thank them for sharing. If you think it’s controversial, perhaps ask the room if anyone had thoughts on what the person shared.]
Thank you so much. This is a big topic – so thank you for engaging and getting stuck in. As Christians it’s so important that we engage with this issue. Not only because we’re called to be good stewards of creation, and to love our neighbours – both of which are impacted by plastic pollution — but also because of how consumerism challenges people’s God-given identity. It misdirects us so we look for fulfilment and happiness in stuff rather than in God.

It would be easy for us just to talk and then go back to normal – so we want to take a few minutes now to put all of this into action.

As we heard in the video, consumerism is a huge worldwide problem involving global systems and big corporations. And earlier on, I talked about how companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever are selling loads of plastic in poorer countries, leaving people surrounded by mountains of rubbish.

**SLIDE 4:**

That includes people like Daiane Maria, who is 23 years old and lives with her sister, her husband and their children in Brazil. She says, ‘It only has to rain and everything floods. A lot of rubbish comes down the river. There are old wardrobes, dead animals, fridges and lots of plastic. What I see most are water bottles and fizzy drink bottles, the type of bottles that are not returnable.’

Because of the mountains of waste, their health problems are serious and include diarrhoea and diseases spread by rats and mosquitoes.

Daiane says, ‘When it floods, everyone gets diarrhoea and sickness. Just this week I had to help my daughter, who was vomiting. Another problem is the rats. There are lots of rats. Almost everyone here has had dengue fever. I get very down but there is nothing I can do about it, because I don’t have anywhere else to go.’
SLIDE 5:

On your table are some Rubbish Campaign cards and now is your moment to SPEAK UP! Together, we’re asking these companies not to be rubbish and to take responsibility for the plastic waste mountains their products are creating in poorer communities.

There are pens on your table too, so I’m going to give you a bit of time to read and sign the cards. Please do add your name and address to make it count. You’ll be joining thousands of Christians, not just in this country but around the world, who are calling on these companies to take action. If you’d like to hear more about the campaign, do tick to receive Tearfund Action emails but obviously feel free to tick or not tick any of the options for Tearfund to contact you.

[Leave a few minutes for people to do this.]

SLIDE 6:

Thank you. As well as challenging us to speak up, in the film Ruth invited us to make changes in our own lives. So, to end the event, I’m going to give you some time to pray and ask God what one change you could make in your own life: to live more simply, to reconnect things to the places and people involved in producing them, and to speak up about injustice. There’s also space on the action card where you can write down a commitment to reduce your own plastic waste, so can I invite you to complete that as well if you’d like to?

[Again, leave a few minutes for people to pray and think of something. If time allows, you might also want to invite them to share their ideas with the person or people next to them, or to write their pledges up on a board as well as on the action card. You could invite them to bring the relevant, completed sections of their action cards to the front and put them in a big (empty!) bin, or ask them to leave them on their tables.]
CONCLUDING YOUR EVENT

Thank those who helped organise the event and those who brought food, and pray to close.

HERE’S A SUGGESTED PRAYER:

Creator God,

We thank you for your beautiful creation that you’ve given us to steward.

Thank you, Jesus, that we find our identity in you, and are loved and forgiven by you. Thank you that we don’t need things to define us.

Help us to be people who live more simply and care for your creation, and help us to remember the people who make our food, clothes, phones and more – so we can love our neighbours better.

We pray too for the companies we’ve petitioned together. God, would you inspire them to clear up this plastic pollution and to make bold changes to the way they work?

In Jesus’ name, Amen
Thank you for organising a Rubbish Event. We hope it wasn't so rubbish after all but that you and all those who came along had a great time.

We'd love to hear how it went, see some photos and hear your feedback about the resources. Please email us at campaigns@tearfund.org and please send the completed cards back to Tearfund Campaigns team, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE. If possible, send them back to us by March 2020 (but do send them to us even after that date, as we'll make sure they're still added to our conversations with companies later too).

You might want to follow up after the event with any people who are particularly enthusiastic. Perhaps some guests had ideas about how the church could take this further and would like to work together to make this happen. Actions you could consider include replacing single-use cups with washable mugs or reusable cups, introducing recycling and compost bins to your church, or organising a waste walk in your town or along a nearby river or beach. Or perhaps now is the time to begin the Eco Church journey (or Eco-Congregation if you live in Scotland, Northern Ireland or beyond)!

Do let us know what you do, and if there are any ways we can support you.
USEFUL LINKS

TEARFUND RESOURCES

• More information on our Rubbish Campaign
  [www.tearfund.org/action](http://www.tearfund.org/action)

• Guidance on reducing plastic:
  [www.tearfund.org/lifestyle](http://www.tearfund.org/lifestyle)

• Our reports and policy papers on waste:
  [www.tearfund.org/circular](http://www.tearfund.org/circular)

• Start your Eco Church journey at
  [www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)
  If you are in Scotland, Northern Ireland or beyond, head over to [Eco-Congregation](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)

WEBSITES THAT LIST ZERO-WASTE SHOPS AROUND THE UK


• [https://www.beeswaxwraps.co.uk/plastic-free-map](https://www.beeswaxwraps.co.uk/plastic-free-map)

• [http://plasticisrubbish.com/2015/08/16/refill-stores](http://plasticisrubbish.com/2015/08/16/refill-stores)

• [https://zerowastenear.me](https://zerowastenear.me)

• [https://www.doyourbitni.com](https://www.doyourbitni.com)

FURTHER READING ON CONSUMERISM AND LIVING SIMPLY

• *Just living*, Ruth Valerio

• *Celebration of discipline*, Richard Foster
  – the chapter on ‘Simplicity’
1. Is plastic fantastic? Why or why not?

2. What's your most rubbish joke?

3. In what ways are you already trying to cut down your plastic use?

4. Have you ever thought about plastic pollution in theological terms? What Bible verses come to mind when thinking about this issue?

5. If you took part in the food challenge, how easy did you find it to go plastic-free?

6. Are there any brands whose products you would secretly love to own? Why?

7. Are you an Apple or android/PC person? Why?
Discuss each of these questions in small groups. Not everyone has to speak for every question, but make sure you make space for both chatty and quiet people to contribute.

1. **What stood out to you most from the film? Is there anything you particularly agree or disagree with?**

2. **Ruth talked about three features of consumerism. Have you noticed them in society? How about in your own life?**
   
   - **Detachment**: we buy products without awareness of the people and places involved in making them.
   - **Dissatisfaction**: we're taught to long for 'the next thing', to be happier or more complete.
   - **Identity**: we often desire not the object but the identity it offers us.

3. **In response to 'detachment', Ruth challenged us to reconnect with where our stuff comes from, as a way of loving our neighbours. How would this help?**

4. **Ruth said living simply can be a way of positively resisting consumerism. What are you already doing – or what could you do – in your own life to live more simply? How can people on a tight budget make ethical and sustainable lifestyle choices?**

5. **Why is speaking up important when it comes to resisting consumerism? What might the role of the church be and how could we get more of the Christians we know on board?**