



Global Community Hour: March 2023:

Youth empowerment, especially girls and young women

Introduction:

If you have been with us for either of our most recent Global Community Hours, you will know that, for the first part of this year, we are dedicating each month of our Global Community Hour to a theme that helps us focus on preparing for this year's "High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development." This conference, which takes place each July, is an opportunity for the entire global community to reflect on our progress (or lack of progress) toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. If you are not already familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals, they are, in summary, the UN's plan for addressing a wide range of the world's biggest challenges between 2015 and 2030.

While there are 17 Goals, five have been selected as areas of focus for this year's progress review. They are the goals focused on water and sanitation, clean and affordable energy, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities, and partnerships that support sustainable development. This month, rather than focusing on a particular Goal, however, we are going to focus on an important part of the population whose voice is especially needed in the visualization, planning, and realization of sustainable development. That population is our youth.

While the UN may seem like an environment for conversation among the most mature adults, the UN system actually recognizes that the world's young people need to be part of the development conversation. In many settings, they are already experiencing more intensely the burdens of poverty, violence, environmental destruction, and unsustainable development than the older generations among us. And, of course, because they have more years of life ahead of them, they will be most affected by all policy decisions made by government and industry leaders today. For this reason, the UN has an annual forum, known as the ECOSOC Youth Forum, which is held each April. The proceedings are partly held at UN Headquarters in New York, become an annual conference in which the world's young people are convened to exchange experiences and create a joint contribution to the HLPF, which, again, is the July forum in which SDG progress is reviewed on a global level.

For that reason, we have chosen the theme of youth empowerment for our Global Community Hour this month as a way of gathering some insights and good practices from but they have increasingly included elements that are accessible online in order to involve more young people from around the world. This forum began in 2012 as a standalone conference on creation of job opportunities for young people. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 201, however, it has

you all that could be applied to the Youth Forum in April as well as the global SDG review forum in July.

Prayer:

Holding this theme in our hearts, let us enter into our opening prayer...

You will be invited at several moments during this prayer to share a name or word. If you wish to share, please unmute yourself briefly to say your name or word and then mute yourself again.

We begin with a few verses of gospel inspiration: Matthew 19: 13-15

The Little Children and Jesus

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

As we gather today, we recognize that many forces, many systems and cultural ills within our social and economic order are causing harm to our youth. We see their hopes for the future being stolen by those among us who fail to think or care about future generations as much as they care about gathering goods and comforts for themselves in the present moment. We pause now for a few moments of silence to grieve this theft of hope and possibility...

If you feel called, you are now invited to speak aloud a word or two to describe a force or phenomenon that you see causing young people to lose hope for a bright future...

Against all these systemic challenges, we see that the spark of youth continues to battle. In many places and individuals, we have seen young people bring powerful insights and clarity to address problems that have confounded adults. We have seen in young people a keen sense of fairness and justice as well as a determination to establish more righteous communities. We pause now for a few moments of silence to stand in awe of the new ideas and fierce passions that young people continue to hold up against the great challenges they face...

If you feel called, you are now invited to speak aloud the name of a young person whose fresh ideas or whose righteousness has inspired you...

God, in our world's young people you continue to "make all things new." Through the daring and open minds of the young people we have mentioned, and through so many others whose names we do not know, you continue to give us reason for hope that your reign can still come to this world. We pause now for a slightly longer moment of silence in which we think of the young people we personally encounter in

ministry or in community life and consider one way in which we can help to encourage or lift up their voices and leadership...

If you feel called, you are now invited to speak aloud, in a word or short phrase, one action you would like to take to support youth...

God, we have heard in the gospel that, in our endeavors to build your city on earth, that youth are not meant to be our followers, but rather, our leaders. Help us to always make the proper space in our hearts, in our work, in our daily interactions for the leadership of young people. Help us to remember our own youth and the wisdom you bestowed upon us as young people. Give us the strength to hold onto that passion and sense of justice with which we came into the world so that it may be a bridge of good will and shared purpose among all generations on earth.

We ask this in the name of the Creator, and the Christ, and the Holy Spirit... Amen.