



Global Community Hour: April 2023:

SDG 9: Industry, innovation, infrastructure

Introduction:

For the next several months of Global Community Hour, we will take as our theme one of the issues that will serve as a focus of 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. This month, we will focus our Global Community Hour on Goal #9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.

I find the words in that goal to be a bit mysterious and difficult to understand, so I will take a couple minutes now to unpack what SDG 9 entails.

In the area of "infrastructure," the goal seeks to decrease the distance between rural communities and the nearest all-season road to no more than 2km.

In the area of "industrialization", the goal intends to increase the portion of national income derived from manufacturing and the portion of working people employed in that type of work. It also aims to see small-scale businesses (fewer than 100 employees) thrive by increasing their access to loans and credit and their share of national income. Critically, Goal 9 seeks not only an increase in certain types of economic activity, but also that the machinery and processes used in all industrial activity be upgraded in favor of reducing the harm done by industry to the natural environment.

In the area of "innovation," the goal calls for increased public and private investment in scientific research and development of technology that can make industrial activities and the goods they produce more environmentally sustainable.

The final component of SDG 9 that I will mention is perhaps the most immediately relevant to those of us gathered here. SDG 9 includes the aim of achieving universal and affordable access to internet in the least developed countries. 2022 reports tell us that 95% cent of the world population has access to a mobile broadband network. However, the coverage gap is more significant in least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, where 17% of the population remains without any access to a mobile broadband network. These reports also do not include measures of internet reliability or of the reliability of access to the electricity on which our devices depend.

In summary, when we talk about SDG 9, we are talking about working toward:

- Sustainable and resilient roads and infrastructure for energy and water
- Economic shift toward manufacturing and small-scale business
- Innovation and investments to improve sustainability of economic activities
- Digital access for all

With that information in our hands, let us enter into our opening prayer on the theme of infrastructure, industrialization, and innovation...

Prayer:

Contemplating this theme, I was reminded of an adage that was spoken often in my home: "*Necessity* is the mother of invention."

In conversations on these aspects of SDG 9, we hear much talk of necessity and need. Let us pause for a moment now to call to mind one particular need that is not being met for the marginalized communities we serve...

If you feel called, you are now invited to name the need aloud in a few words as well as the name of the place or community in which you have witnessed that need...

After each of the following petitions, you are invited to respond "Amen."

- Holy Spirit, give us the wisdom to discern rightly between "needs" and "wants." Let our innovations be a response to true necessity, not to greed.
- Holy Spirit, inspire us to pour our hearts into innovations contribute to a culture of dignity rather than a culture of excess and consumption.
- Holy Spirit, give us the patience to listen carefully to the needs expressed by others. Let our definition of "necessity" be the offspring of open ears and open minds.

In initiatives to advance technology and increase industrial activity, we often hear our leaders mis-define "innovation" or "advancement" as a shiny object, procedure, or idea that functions as a miracle for a few at the expense of many. Sometimes we hear our leaders place their faith in technological advancement, insisting that it is the miracle that will save us from our tendencies to abuse our planet and one another. We hear them encouraging others to join them in denial of the need to change our behavior and heal our relationships with creation.

Let us pause for a moment now to call to mind a situation in our world in which technology or industrial activity has caused harm or injustice...

If you feel called, you are now invited to name one of these situations of injustice in just a few words...

After each of the following petitions, you are invited to respond "Amen."

- Holy Spirit, keep a fire for justice in our hearts so that we never settle for innovations that bring good quality of life to only a few.
- Holy Spirit, let us not acquiesce to the permanence of poverty or ecosystem destruction in our world, but rather, remain determined that we can and must find solutions that serve our whole global community.
- Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith that another world, a true city of God, is possible. Let our concept of "innovation" be a fruit of that faith.

When we celebrate innovation, we hear many inspiring stories of women and men who have taken leadership in carving new paths and solutions in service of the common good. Let us pause for a moment

now to call to mind the names of those individuals and groups who we recognise for envisioning a better world and working to build it...

If you feel called, you are now invited to name one of these innovative women and men (or a group of them)...

After each of the following petitions, you are invited to respond "Amen."

- Holy Spirit, help us to hold in our minds the names and memories of these innovators who have inspired and taught us to envision and build a better world, so that we may hold tightly to that vision and never let it be shaken from our grip by the depth of the challenges we face and the disappointments we encounter.
- Holy Spirit, give us the strength to resist the temptation of surrender when setbacks and challenging lessons threaten to disillusion us or to divert us from our path.
- Holy Spirit, awaken our creative nature, so that we can carry forward these leaders' torch of innovation into a brighter future for all.

So we return to this adage: "Necessity is the mother of invention." We have named that we are in a time of tremendous, deep necessity. We have named that we are living in a time of many false innovations that do not advance the cause of life and justice but rather advance and deepen inequality and ecological harm. We have named many parents of true innovation and advancement who have shared their creative gifts to bring greater dignity and justice to the world.

Let us resolve together today to be daughters and sons of true, sustainable innovation so that our own vision can be the mother of infrastructure and industrial activities that foster just and peace.

Amen.