



Prayer for JCoR Global Community Hour: May 2023

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

During the first half of this year's Global Community Hour gatherings, we have taken 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 #11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

In summary, when we talk about SDG 11, we are talking about working toward:

- Safe and adequate housing for all (As of 2022, nearly 1.1 billion people lived in slums or other informal housing conditions in urban area That number is expected to increase by 2 billion over the next 30 years.)
- convenient access to public transport (Only about half of the world's urban population currently has such access.)
- more efficient use of land and other resources in cities (In the last decade, the amount of land occupied by cities was growing at three times the rate of those cities' populations. This tells us that we are moving toward requiring more space per person in cities, or less efficient use of space.)
- increased participation of civil society in urban planning processes
- increased investment to protect important cultural sites and natural landscapes in cities
- reduce the number of number of deaths, economic losses, infrastructural damages, and interruptions of essential public services resulting from disasters (Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, the number of countries with local plans to reduce their vulnerability to disasters doubled.)
- improve management of solid waste and air quality (In 2022, the global average solid waste collection rate in cities was at 82%. In sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, the waste collection rates are less than 60%.)
- increase accessibility and safety of open, public spaces (Urban planners recommend that about 40% of land in cities be designated as open, public space. A recent study of over 1,000 cities from around the world showed that the vast majority of cities are only reserving about half that space for public use.)
- reduce environmental impact of new building construction by shifting toward use of materials that are more durable and locally sourced and by shifting toward building designs that are more energy efficient and resilient to disasters

With that information in our hands, let us enter into our opening prayer on the theme of sustainable and inclusive cities...

If you live in an urban environment, I invite you to shift your position so that you are able to see and hear the world outside your window. If you live in a more rural area, I invite you to close your eyes and do your best to recall the scene of a recent experience of one of the cities that is nearest to you.

Where are people living? What kind of roofs and walls do they have overhead to shelter them from sun, rain, and cold? What protection do they have in the event of rising waters or a tremor in the earth?

Imagine how housing would look if your city were the City of God. How would it be transformed? Hold this image in your mind for a few moments.

...With this vision in mind, we pray together, "Let us build the City of God."

Take a deep breath. What is the air like? What smells does it carry? How does it feel inside your nose? Does it refresh your lungs as they open?

Imagine what the air would be like if your city were the City of God. How would it look, feel, smell? Hold this idea in your mind for a few moments.

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How do people move around in your city? Can they get to a public bus or train? Can they afford to travel by public transport to all the places they need to go? Do they have access to bicycles and safe roads to ride them on?

Imagine what the movement of people would be like if your city were the City of God. How would it be transformed? Hold this idea in your mind for a few moments.

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Where are the open, natural spaces in your city? Are they large enough for everyone's play and recreation? Do they offer sufficient opportunity for the people to be educated by the plants, animals, and natural landscape of your region? Are they open and accessible to everyone without discrimination? Can all people enjoy them in safety and without fear of violence or harassment?

Imagine what these spaces would be like if your city were the City of God. How would they be transformed? Hold this idea in your mind for a few moments.

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How is waste managed in your city? Can you see it in the streets or collecting in bodies of water? Are different types of waste separated? If waste is being regularly collected and removed from your sight, do you and the people around you know where it is being taken? Do you know who lives there and how they are affected by the arrival of your waste? Is the amount of waste being produced reasonable for the number of people who live here?

Imagine what waste would look like if your city were the City of God. How much would there be? What would the people know about its destination and its impact? How would the land and water be shielded from it? Hold this idea in your mind for a few moments.

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When plans or decisions are being made about how land or resources are used in your city, what opportunity do the people of your city have to speak? If they have the chance and capacity to speak, how well are they heard?

Imagine what urban planning would be like if your city were the City of God. Who would have a meaningful voice? What impact would it have on the decisions being made? Hold this idea in your mind for a few moments.

...With this vision in mind, we pray together, "Let us build the City of God."

God, we see outside our own windows, in news reports, and in our own memories that there are great gaps between the cities in which we live and the Cities of your Kingdom. Inspire each one of us the your love and dedication, so that we may make use of the time and gifts that you have offered to us to renew the urban face of the Earth and to build together cities that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Be our companion and guide as we work to build a true City of God.

Amen.