

A VISION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT AND WHAT ENHANCES IT

PRAYERFUL REFLECTIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL NUMBER ELEVEN

As the new universal set of UN targets and indicators get under way in our world, it is necessary to reflect on how we can contribute as a Congregation to the deeper questions of meaning and purpose of these political strategies. C7 of *Our Way of Life* clearly calls us: “...our vision, like Nano’s, reaches beyond our local situations and has a global consciousness and outreach”



GOAL NUMBER 11 asks us to

“make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”

The *United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development* (Habitat 111) took place in Quito, Ecuador from the 17th to the 20th October, 2016 and up to 50,000 participants from all over the world discussed the global responsibility for sustainable cities for the next 20 years. The New Urban Agenda was unanimously adopted by member states and the MDG goals’ focus on eradicating poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability moved to a far wider concept of the city and respect for human and earth rights as a road to achieving a life of dignity for all, as expressed in the SDG goal 11.

GATHER AS A COMMUNITY OR SMALL GROUP TO LISTEN TO **ANANYA GUHA’S POEM**
AS YOU SET IT TO SOFT MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND:

At a corner curled is a robust thief
In city of cities beside a mall
In city of cities.
Fictive city, city of imagination
City of cities.
In city of cities the walled fortresses
Speak of a new age, unbecoming light.
Guns rule roost, in city of cities.

Shaft of light
Droning voices
Dancing figures
Apostates in city of cities.

In waking night
Troubadour of times
City of cities
You weave a thin life
Premeditated living
As arsonists and bombers
Tear shreds of your life
In abject gluttony

City of cities your riposte is
Your will, silent answer to
Marauders as you undergo face lift
Breathing new life
Into city of cities.
Ragpickers can only question.
Tormenters of times
City of cities.



Today, we give ourselves sacred time, sacred space, sacred thought to see how we can be part of changing this story. Over the years many members of our Presentation family have seen positive changes in our cities and have built up strong communities which have enhanced the sacredness of all life.

Silent reflection or sharing on the following:

- **How is it possible nowadays to be able to continue to breathe new life into our cities or places of human settlements?**
- **How can we cultivate a contemplative attentiveness to the city so that I can see God in all the various encounters of everyday life?**
- **Do I live in an inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable neighborhood?**
- **How am I enriched by the struggles and successes of local communities in the bonds of belonging and linking with them?**
- **How can we, as Presentation family enhance our zest for life by being engaged, committed and involved with what is going on around us?**

FACTS ABOUT CITIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY:

Living in the city has become a complicated act of navigation. Urban conglomerations now contain fast changing, diverse populations. The built environment is constantly renovated, redeveloped and gentrified. More than half the world's population now live in cities. In London, for example, often described as a 'super-diverse' city, it is estimated that over 300 languages are spoken.

Violence, exclusion of the vulnerable, drugs, homelessness, migration, unemployment, chaotic traffic and smog are all endless lists of an ongoing reality. A deeply divided two-tier society is in evidence and, yet, the UN predicts that by 2050, 66% of the world's population will be living in cities. So, what makes our cities and human settlements so attractive?

We do not negate the problems but perhaps a new way of looking at our cities will eventually bring forth a just and peaceful community of life. The healers, the technologies, the inspirations are everywhere as universal energies are raising the vibration of the universe. We pray for a heightened focus and clarity about the nature of the challenge for this sustainable development goal.



**NEW ORLEANS:
AN EXAMPLE OF A
RESILIENT CITY**



Practical Suggestions:

With camera or cell phone, walk the streets of the city with a group of young people and search for all the positive signs of life and creativity, the artist or musician earning a living, the happy family enjoying an ice-cream as summer approaches in the southern hemisphere or share a hot drink with a homeless person as winter sets in in the Northern countries. There are endless possibilities in our cities for visiting the elderly inhabitants and listening and recording their stories. How can we be, in so many ways gardeners of the spirit as we relate to all of life each day? We can encourage the designers and the planners to continue their innovations but city-making is also about the vision of the human spirit and what enhances it.

There are very positive signs of successful modern cities and during Habitat 111 there were many examples of roadmaps for alliances towards a better urban future. The right to the city encompasses all civil, political, economic, social cultural and environmental rights as enshrined in existing international human rights treaties, covenants and conventions (*Vienna Declaration 1993*). We witnessed, during this recent October Convention, many examples of grassroots women's groups and communities in partnership with other local and national level actors as they exemplified how they were promoting resilient and sustainable urban development.

This **2012 TED prize wish** is worth looking up. The city speaks and here is its desire: **TED City 2.0**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cST7IJ-3HR8>

I am the crucible of the future,
I am where humanity will flourish or fade,
I am being rebuilt and reborn,
I am innovative.
I wish to be inclusive, soulful, thriving,
Share your tools, designs,
Combine the reach of the cloud with the power of the crowd.
Begin by connecting
Together we can bridge the gap between rich and poor,
Dream me, build me, make me real.



TIME'S OTHER COUNTRY

Michael Roberts

*I walked, frowning across the Cathedral Square,
I was late, and I had another appointment later,
The city crowded upon me, the walls narrowed;
And suddenly traffic, walls, loudspeakers vanished.*

*I have only to stop hurrying, and a seed springs up
Making a green place in the city, sweeping away the
clock,
Fountains burst up through pavements hard as habit,
Lightly I walk through a wall, and the sky is open.*



The fixed stable structures are quickly giving way to a flow of information and energy in organized forms that interact with other forms and their surrounding environments. As we peer into the windows of an uncertain, but exciting future, we see the rich possibilities, the complexity and the hope of making our cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.



*This reflection was prepared by Sr. Mary Ivers, Ecuador
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