Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



A man runs in front of the sun rising over the lower Manhattan skyline in Jersey City, N.J., on June 8. Intense Canadian wildfires are blanketing the northeastern U.S. in a dystopian haze, turning the air acrid, the sky yellowish gray and prompting warnings for vulnerable populations to stay inside. (AP/Seth Wenig)



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I find the commemoration of Holy Trinity Sunday insightful. I am moved by the awareness that our God is one of mutual relationships. I am not a theologian and will not attempt to explain the consubstantial relationship of our triune God. I am, however, a believer that we are invited to participate in a relationship with our God and experience God's creation and love with each other.

My formation in religious life and as a Dominican Sister of Peace highlighted the importance of community and how our mutuality allows us to share in communion with God. Living in a religious community, we are dependent on each other. I am aware that my actions and contributions can empower or harm my community — and vice versa. The invitation to live in a relationship of solidarity allows me access to the presence of God. Yes, there are times when my sisters/co-workers annoy me, and I am certain that there are times when I annoy them. At times of tension and eye-rolling, we are invited to see God's invitation and engage in conversation with curiosity.

In recent years, my awareness of my community began to extend beyond my house, neighborhood, and congregation. I — along with you — are members of our global community. I am in awe of the opportunity to experience God in creation and to celebrate God’s love in our beautiful and diverse common home.

My awareness of my global citizenship was heightened by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical Laudato Si'. Before reading the encyclical, I was not aware of our profound connectivity and interdependence. Pope Francis reminds us that

> everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, and mother earth.

Laudato Sí' opened my eyes to the awareness of climate migration, global pandemics, and the effects of pollution and waste. Most importantly, it invited me to be mindful of my contributions to my global community and to be accountable for my carbon footprint.

As I write this column, my hometown of New Haven, Connecticut, is on Day 2 of an air quality alert. A visible landmark — East Rock — in my neighborhood became shrouded by an orange curtain of fog. As I left my home to go to my ministry, the smell of smoke filled the air from a fire that is about 430 miles away.

Reports alerted us that unusual dry weather conditions and climate change contributed to a "brutal wildfire season" in Canada. Officials are asking citizens to remain indoors with closed windows and to wear N-95 masks. The freakish cloud that surrounds my neighborhood and most of the Northeast U.S. is a perfect example of our interconnectedness. In Laudato Sí Pope Francis reminds us that lack of mindfulness and expendable consumption contribute to rising temperatures that lead to droughts, forest fires and reduced quality of life for all of God's creation in our common home.

At times, the concept of climate change feels overwhelming and very daunting. I am glad for the community, as I am surrounded by wonderful sisters and people that are more informed on climate change and the approaches to tackling the problem. One sister reminded me that climate change can be like a very dirty and messy room. To clean it up, it is important not to become overwhelmed by the chaos, but to start in a corner. Little by little, build up and eventually the room will be back to order.

Overall, we need to help reduce greenhouse gasses generated by our behaviors. Each one of us has a carbon footprint that contributes to our collective output of greenhouse gasses, which in turn contributes to increasing our global temperature. It is estimated that the average American has a carbon footprint of 16 tons per year. Globally, the carbon footprint average is close to 4 tons per person.

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I can start in my little corner and be responsible for my carbon footprint. Several carbon footprint calculators help create mindfulness in personal behaviors and also provide helpful information on practices to implement. The EPA, the Nature Conservancy and 8 Billion Trees are among the organizations that have insightful carbon footprint calculators. I find the calculator helpful, as it allows me to manage and measure my behaviors. Because of my results and my need to contribute positively to my global community, I am working on reducing my plastic dependency, riding my bicycle, walking or carpooling as much as possible.

At first, riding my bicycle and walking added time to my commute. Eventually, during my commute, I started to notice certain trees, natural beauty, neighbors and the presence of God. This practice allows me to slow down a bit, and walk prayerfully while encountering God and my community. While I am not an expert environmentalist, I am mindful of the need to respect God's creation and be a good community member.

We are all invited to participate in a relationship with our God and experience God’s creation and love with each other. I am aware that my actions in New Haven, Connecticut, are connected with you. While I finish this column I am aware that in Canada and the United States, many people are changing their daily routines: Some are evacuating their homes, and others are taking precautions to avoid health risks.

My little corner is showing me that I must act and live in solidarity with my global community. While I continue to live my life in communion with my triune God, I must continue to be in a relationship with my neighbors and God's creation. I can continue my accountability to the care of God's creation by taking small steps.

Please join me in praying for the displaced in Canada and in other parts of the world due to natural disasters. I also invite you to participate in our mutual commitment to God's creation. Let's do this together and in our communal neighborhood. We are all interconnected. We are all in this together. Let's be kind to each other.