



On the Cry of the Poor: Creating space for all voices

“[W]e cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.”

Laudato Si’: On care for our common home, 119

In part five of our seven-part series on the [Laudato Si’ goals](#), we look at ‘the Cry of the Poor’ and how the Family of Holy Cross is responding to this need. Answering ‘the Cry of the Poor’ means protecting all forms of life on Earth, embracing and promoting eco-justice, engaging in social analysis, and working for systemic change to improve society as a whole. We respond to this call whenever we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, giving special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous communities, children at-risk, and migrants and refugees. As this example from South Bend, Indiana (USA) demonstrates, Sister of the Holy Cross Mary Turgi, with financial support from her congregation’s Ministry with the Poor Fund, has been partnering with local community organization the Near Northwest Neighborhood, Inc., (“NNN”) to bring people together and create space for open dialogues on race, equity, and inclusivity.

Community Partnerships: Creating space for all voices

Ask any member of the Near Northwest Neighborhood (“NNN”) community organization what makes their community so special and you are very likely to hear about its lively gatherings, unique spaces such as the Local Cup—a neighborhood-run coffee shop, and annual community events such as the Arts Café. You will hear about the decades-long neighborhood preservation and revitalization efforts that continue to provide affordable housing opportunities for people of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and educational and financial levels—efforts strengthened by building relationships with the City of South Bend and community partners such as the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Perhaps most importantly you will hear about the people and how the rich diversity among them has contributed to the vitality and vibrance, the very character, of the neighborhood.



The Sisters of the Holy Cross and NNN have long been natural partners because they share a fundamental goal: ‘building communities of justice and love - creating spaces that are welcoming, diverse, equitable and inclusive of everyone.’

Mary Turgi, Sister of the Holy Cross and NNN board member



When NNN members began to recognize “the Cry of the Poor” among their own community members experiencing the pain of systemic injustice and disparity, they decided to create a series of restorative justice community conversation circles focused on race and racial equity in the near northwest neighborhood, as a means of creating space for all voices to be heard and to help residents mobilize for change. NNN also recognized the importance of engaging the support of community partners for funding resources as well as to connect with restorative justice experts in the community to help facilitate these efforts.

Sister of the Holy Cross Mary Turgi, who serves on the NNN board of directors, notes, “The Sisters of the Holy Cross and NNN have long been natural partners...[committed to] building communities of justice and love.”

United in their efforts to promote equity and community empowerment, this partnership fundamentally resonates with the call to “Respond to the Cry of the Poor.” This call to solidarity, to parity, also echoes the wisdom of Holy Cross founder Blessed Basile Anthony Moreau who observed in *Christian Education* that, “[I]t is only just to give more to those who have received less.”

The fruits of NNN’s conversation circles included connecting residents with one another, surfacing and engaging neighbors’ gifts for the common good, identifying and nurturing leaders in the neighborhood with representation from all racial and socioeconomic groups, and helping residents to mobilize and develop the skills to identify and address specific problems in their own area or in the neighborhood as a whole. From a more personal perspective, Sister Mary acknowledged that she has been profoundly changed by the stories of her neighbors and friends sharing their lived-experiences of the pain inflicted by racism and moved by the vulnerability and courage with which participants openly confronted the problem of learned biases. Ultimately, this project serves as an example of what we can achieve when we come together with common purpose and partner with like-minded institutions for collective impact. What first began as a local concern has become a model for grassroots action, empowerment, and advocacy.

Suggested Reflection Questions

- Which local movements, organizations, or other partners could you work with on this issue? Which opportunities do you see to respond to ‘the Cry of the Poor’ where you live and work?
- With which local movements, organizations, or other partners could you connect on this issue?

Action

- Watch Pope Francis’ inspiring **film *The Letter*** available in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.
- Take action with suggestions from *The Letter* website: <https://www.theletterfilm.org/>.
- Connect with efforts in your local community, institutions, and social media.
- Create a plan for responding to “the Cry of the Poor” where you live and work.

Prayer

Lord, open our ears to the Cry of the Poor and vulnerable that we might recognize the voices of suffering in our midst.

Help us, O God, to create spaces of peace where the diverse voices of your people can be heard and respected by all, that those living in disparity may experience the renewal of justice.

With courage and humility, let us meet one another with authenticity and understanding that we might embrace the opportunity of true encounter, that through our connection we be united in our care and commitment to care for all creation and our common home.

Amen.

