Chadian Sister Engages Kansas City Youth about Peace and Justice
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In Kansas City, Every Day Is a Festival of Lights!

What have I discovered about Kansas City? Many things. One thing that surprises me is that here in KC, every day is a Festival of Lights!

Why do I say that? Well, where I live, it’s not candles that provide light but small electric lamps – even in the middle of the day when there is a radiant blue sky.

This practice somewhat astounds me, when we live together in a world where we must be wise with resources. For me, it raises questions about sustainable development and sustainable economies.

Unlike old Simeon who can give thanks and let his hymns of praise and glory ascend to God, I find questions growing in me. How can this endless brightness persist? In my first days, I looked around the apartment entrance for light switches but found none. I tried asking neighbours I met in the stairwell for help, and other people around me. They merely smiled. It seemed to surprise them that in daytime I sought to switch off
the lights. As if to say, regarding the constant iridescent glow, “Oh, that’s just how things are here.”

I cannot hide my sense of bewilderment. In countries where people have little energy, we talk about conserving it, yet here there seems to be so much that it can be wasted. How can my small daily conservation efforts contribute to humankind’s good, when I see the lights of a whole apartment complex shining day and night for, I suppose, 365 days a year?

I am reminded of the lines of questioning of people and organizations working for sustainable development. “Is our way of life sustainable?” This begs the question of personal and collective responsibility for economies in energy and for the protection of the environment. This is what we are talking about, no? Pope Francis says that everything is interconnected.

How do we live in society with others, in this world of which we are a part? Are the world’s problems mine too? Is the fight for the protection of the planet, of “our common Home” according to the Pope, mine too?

Elena Lasida shared the following in a lecture to nuns in Paris in 2009: “We separate too much environmental issues from our ways of life, our ways of living together, and our collective initiatives. If environmental issues are reduced to turning off the water when brushing one’s teeth, switching off the light when leaving a room, and turning off the computer when not using it, then we can say that, yes, one is responsible in managing natural resources. While this changes a few habits, it does not change much when it comes to collective social action.” (translated from French)

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6 See: “La responsabilité sociale et environnementale d’une communauté religieuse...” (p. 9), a paper prepared for the March 4, 2009 meeting in Paris of the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCHD) Terre Solidaire, an organization registered in accordance with French law and
Young people, called to be responsible for tomorrow, what do you think of these words? As for me, curiously, they do not leave me in peace. In a way, Elena’s words give meaning to my acts and reveal to me that my mission is not limited to just changing my own habits. My responsibility as a citizen of the world goes further.

I understand that my conservation of energy or of water must fit into programs and policies, into a common vision for society, if I really want to work for the preservation of the planet. Yes, what are we doing together on this planet? With neighbors close by and with people faraway from us?

We are interdependent. We can no longer think and act at local or national levels only. We must also think of the whole world and be global. I desire to progress in my commitments and in my acts. Being here is a way of learning how to become a citizen of the world!

operating under the patronage of the French Bishops’ Conference.
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