



The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – AUGUST 2023

From the NGO Desk

For close to two decades, I was blessed to invite countless St. John's University students into the Vincentian charism by way of the transformative discovery of finding God in service to those living in poverty, with the hope and prayer that these students, in return, would use their faith and education to create a more just society.

Since joining this important and timely ministry at the United Nations, I am undergoing my own spiritual and intellectual transformation as I come to better understand the systemic injustices that contribute and often create structures of inequity which violate human rights.

As we know, the Vincentian family is committed to ending homelessness. I marvel at the heroic members of our global family who dedicate their lives to this task. At the United Nations, it is humbling and inspiring to join this work, especially with the Working Group to End Homelessness. In talking with the Federation NGO Liaisons and other members of the Sisters of Charity Federation, I continue to learn about the local ministries that work toward ending homelessness, as well as additional important justice and human rights issues.

This summer with the High-Level Political Forum where many governments shared their current state of homelessness, and this fall with the General Assembly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit in September, and World Homeless Day in October, homelessness is gaining notable attention.

Let's not forget, that it was less than two years ago when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the first Resolution on homelessness, inclusive social development policies and programs to address homelessness. The Vincentian Family's advocacy was critical in this resolution.

Currently, much of our work focuses on



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holding member states accountable. This includes accurate and just data collection. It also includes creating space at the global table for those with lived experiences of homelessness to share their stories and recommendations for solutions.

This summer, I was blessed to experience homelessness from a distance, reminding me of its urgency and importance. In New York City, the increase in asylum seekers is heartbreaking, as many melt in the summer heat seeking a better situation than they left. On the streets of





San Francisco, I saw the significant number of sidewalk tents that have gained the attention of national media, as well as the infamous plight of so many wounded at Skid Row in Los Angeles. I saw great injustices, from various physical and mental abilities to various ages seeking shelter and food. I also saw communities develop among many who are surviving, including gentle acts of kindness.

Often in contrast to the backdrop of large skyscrapers and fancy restaurants, those living in poverty is increasing and most of the Sustainable Development Goals established in 2015 to be achieved by 2030 are nowhere close to being met.

As the question, “what must be done,” was posed to St. Vincent when his heart was troubled after an encounter with a dying servant, we too must find our answer. Both on the local level of charity and the global work of justice and systemic change, the call to respond, as followers of Jesus in the footsteps of our Vincentian saints and heroes, to help our neighbors in need demands our response.

Right to a Healthy Environment

On June 6th, I was invited to contribute a statement in a Visioning Roundtable at a UN Side Event, “The Right to a Healthy Environment: Looking Ahead.” This event was sponsored by the Community of Religious NGOs (CRNGO). I joined NGO colleagues, faith lead-

ers from across various religions and spiritualities, and experts on climate change, in sharing our hopes for our planet and all that call it home.

It was also announced this summer that the Global Coalition of Civil Society Organizations, Indigenous Peoples, Social Movements, and Local Communities is the recipient of one of the five UN Human Rights Awards for “The universal recognition of the right of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.” This prestigious honor is awarded every five years. [You can read more here.](#)

In gratitude to Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN, the Sisters of Charity Federation is included in this recognized community due to her work and contributions serving in this effort during her tenure as our NGO Representative to the United Nations.

Leadership Meeting: June 2023

I was blessed to attend the Sisters of Charity Federation Leadership Meeting in Antigonish and Prince Edward Island earlier this summer. It was a prayerful and lively experience as I presented my ministry at the UN, while building relationships and a better understanding on how I can contribute to the mission and vision of the Federation. I was especially struck by the kindness, dedication, and faith of those in leadership. You can read more about the meeting [here](#).

It was also a special opportunity to meet many of

the sisters in the Antigonish and PEI communities. I appreciated the warm welcome and opportunity to engage in conversations on how we can all contribute to justice work in the name of our shared charism.

I hope for the opportunity to visit all our congregations in the future and to be with as many of you as possible.

Justice Circle Invitation

Earlier this summer, a new Justice Circle was born out of the vision of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. Open to all members of the Sisters of Charity Federation, this community meets every six weeks to discuss issues of justice, connecting the local and the global. Our most recent meeting in early August focused on homelessness. The conversation continues in September. If you are interested in attending, please contact Mackenzie Doyle, Justice Coordinator for Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, at mackenzie.doyle@srcharity-cinti.org.



Pope Francis Addresses UN Security Council

Earlier this summer, [Pope Francis issued a statement](#) to the UN Security Council, in partnership with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar, calling for a need for human fraternity to achieve peace. Pope Francis wrote, “The time has come to say an emphatic ‘no’ to war, to state that wars are not just, only peace is just.”

Vatican's foreign minister Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher delivered Pope Francis' statement (he was in hospital). CNS screengrab/ Courtesy United Nations

Leadership Invitations

I am excited to share several leadership positions that I have accepted at the United Nations since January. They include:

- Member at Large: Finance for Development (FFD)
- Co-Chair of Working Group to End Homeless (WGEH) Task Force
- Co-Chair of the Climate Working Group: Committee of Religious NGOs (CRNGO)
- Communications Chair for NGO Committee for Social Development (CSocD)
- 2024 Civil Society Forum Planning Committee
- Justice Coalition of Religious (JCoR) Personnel and Grant Committees

I continue to represent the Sisters of Charity Federation on various other committees addressing specific issues related to justice and our congregational ministries, including: women and girls, migration, mining, human trafficking, among others.

I recently came across these [words of St. John Paul II](#) when he addressed NGOs at the United Nations in October 1979:

“No organization, however, not even the United Nations or any of its specialized agencies, can alone solve the global problems which are constantly brought to its attention, if its concerns are not shared by all the people. It is then the privileged task of the non-governmental organizations to help bring these concerns into the communities and the homes of the people, and to bring back to the established agencies the priorities and aspirations of the people, so that all the solutions and projects which are envisaged may be truly geared to the needs of the human person.”

I join my colleagues at the UN, and in solidarity and communion with you and those you serve and represent, in this important committee work, urging member states and political leaders to transform their hearts and nations. As we enter a new year at the UN, please keep me in your prayers, and be assured that you will be in my prayers as well.