



The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – OCTOBER 2023

From the NGO Desk

St. Vincent de Paul once noted, “God asks for your heart first, and only then for your work.” As I reflect on my first year in this blessed role as NGO Representative at the United Nations for the Sisters of Charity Federation, I recognize with gratitude the countless moments where God asked for my heart, and although not always easy, it is transformative as I trust it has been for you on your journey.

I would like to share a recent experience that exemplifies this, while also reminding us of the task of providing both charity and advocacy for systemic change.

Walking from our United Nations office in Manhattan earlier this month, I witnessed a migrant mother, and her two young girls, preparing their resting place for the night on the corner of Madison Avenue and 38th Street. The children played together, reminding me of my own little ones.

For many years, I served the unhoused in Manhattan, but we never saw children, and rarely saw women. As I watched the mom hold her girls from about a block away, I wondered what my prayer would be if I had to leave my country and home because of violence and injustice. I imagine my plea to God would be for someone to help my girls be safe and healthy. Feeling great sadness and empathy for this family, this beautiful lyric from “The Summons” played gently inside my head and heart: “Will you let me answer prayers in you, and you in me.”

From my privileged position as bystander, I prayed for guidance as my heart broke to answer prayers of these distant travelers. I watched countless New Yorkers and tourists walk by—some staring with judgment, others (myself included), looking with concern but unsure what to do. I was moved by the courageous and



Photo by [Razvan Sassu](#) on [Unsplash](#)

the compassionate who offered of their small fortune, the man who brought the girls new backpacks and pencils, and the mother with children of her own who stopped to listen and advise.

A few days before this distant encounter, we, the [Working Group to End Homelessness](#) (WGEH), celebrated a successful side event, titled, “A Future We Want: A Home for All.” Over 120 people attended virtually, and over 60 were in person (thank you to so many of you who could attend). Here is a [link to the recording](#) if you missed it. The Vincentian Family was well represented and some of our work was highlighted.

We were thrilled to include in our panel two women with lived experiences of homelessness from Ghana and Guatemala. They were served and supported by the Daughters of Charity. The panel also included the Permanent Representative of Poland, and representatives from the FamVin Homeless Alliance, UN Habitat, and The Shift (a UN advocacy group for ending homelessness).

The 90-minute workshop offered housing-first strategies and best practices. It highlighted the need for



Organizers and presenters of the recent homelessness side event [“A Future We Want: A Home for All.”](#) From left: Jimmy Walters, Sisters of Charity Federation; Cecilie Kerns, Mercy International; Lydia Stazen, Institute of Global Homelessness; Jean Quinn, UNANIMA International; Tiffany Connolly, Institute of Global Homelessness; MaryAnn Dantuano, International Association of Charities; Jim Claffey, Congregation of the Mission; Natalie Monteza, FamVin Homeless Alliance; and Pat Mule, International Association of Charities.

data collection, the importance of broadening the term homelessness and explicitly including homelessness in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Most of all, we recognized the urgency for a better response to transform systems that are broken and to give focus to the root causes of poverty that lead so many to not having a safe and secure home.

This urgency rang even louder when I encountered that holy family settling in for a night on my city’s street, just a short walk from the United Nations.

We know, from our experience and our continued learning, that homelessness is not the result of just one issue. There are intersecting factors that cause individuals and families to lack secure housing. All deserve not only secure housing, but a home that allows for holistic health and development.

We also acknowledge the causes of so many of these issues. Take the recent and horrific war in the Middle East that is only adding to the increased numbers of homelessness, traumatized, and sadly, wounded and deceased.

At the end of 2022, [108.4 million people](#) were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations, and this number will only increase. This is directly connected to the often unrecognized reality that [armed conflict](#) is occurring in over 110 countries. We are also familiar with the impact on climate change, the pandemic, lack

of affordable housing, and many other human rights violations that lead to homelessness.

It is the work of our role at the UN and the WGEH to advocate what the Secretary General shared in his [recent report](#), that “Homelessness is both a concrete violation of human rights and an indicator of extreme poverty and social exclusion.” You can [read more here](#) from the WGEH with our advocacy points, expanding on what was a monumental report from the top UN official.

There is no shortage of reminders as to why we serve the person in front of us and advocate for their rights at many local, national, and international tables. The image of that mom and her two girls carved a mark on my heart, adding an urgency and an even greater motivation to our ministry. God certainly has our heart, and together, as humble and faithful servants, we pray that God can continue to answer prayers through us.

Laudate Deum

Pope Francis’ recent Apostolic Exhortation, [Laudate Deum](#), a “part two” of *Laudato Si*, brings great attention to the Climate Conferences in the fourth section of his long anticipated document.

He reviews the history of conferences related to the environment, especially the Conference of the Parties (COP) that meets annually and is the decision-making body of the UN Framework Convention on Climate

Change (UNFCCC). The Holy Father is critical in assessing the failures of past meetings.

He also brings to focus the upcoming COP28 in the United Arab Emirates this December. If time allows,

[consider reading this fourth section](#) in Laudate Deum, as it is brilliantly written and captures the essence of the political climate around our environment and climate change. Pope Francis completes



this section by repeating these strong words from Laudato Si: “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”

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Romero Prayer

Written by Bishop Ken Untener, but often attributed to St. Archbishop Oscar Romero, this prayer has kept me grounded during such difficult times in our world. I am blessed to join you as workers and prophets of a future that is not our own.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church’s mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.