



The UN & You

BY DR. JIMMY WALTERS – APRIL 2023

From the NGO Desk

After a fruitful and busy March at the United Nations with a special focus on women and water, April drew the world's attention to the needs of our Indigenous communities. This special focus was launched by the welcomed news from the Vatican as the Church took a step in the right direction [by rejecting the “Doctrine of Discovery”](#), the theories backed by 15th-century “papal bulls” that legitimized the colonial-era seizure of Native lands and form the basis of some property laws today.

Now, as April comes to a close, and as I continue to reflect on our Indigenous brothers and sisters, I am moved by three experiences that capture the complexity, strength, and the hope from 760 United Nations Plaza. I am grateful to share these with you and I invite you to join me in this reflection and prayer.

Complexity

I joined the Vincentian Family Justice Representatives monthly meeting in mid-April, for the first time. Representatives from the Sisters of Charity Federation, Congregation of the Mission, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and others, prayed and discussed what was on our hearts as we read and studied the Vatican's decision to reject the Doctrine of Discovery.

The conversation was not limited to Indigenous communities, but encompassed all who are persecuted, marginalized, and underserved in the Black and African American communities in North America. We spoke of reparations, advocacy, and land ownership. We questioned what we could do, and what we are called to do, while battling racism, privilege, and indifference.

I was impressed (and at times, humbled) by the wisdom of the community, as well as the active advocacy and practicality that members of our Vincentian family lead with in responding to the hurt, division, and injustices of so many



members of our human family.

While I did not leave this meeting with clear answers, I grew in appreciation for the value of this network and family, and in gratitude for so many who walk and work in our Vincentian charism to serve and to love.

Strength

During the two weeks of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, there were plenty of opportunities to better appreciate the challenges facing our Indigenous communities. While listening to sessions in the United Nations and virtually, what moved me the most of all was a breakfast arranged by the Dominican Leadership Conference with the Achuar Indigenous peoples from the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador.

We gathered on a late April morning, and about half a dozen members of the Achuar community spoke through a translator about their hopes for the conference. They traveled long and far, representing thousands for equality, human rights, and love.

Listening attentively, I was moved by the passion and at times, anguish. As I stared into their tired yet determined eyes, I wondered how they could be so



brave and strong. Could I do the same, I privately pondered. I also wondered how we on the East Side of Manhattan, in our formal “work” clothes and endless skyscrapers, could be so cold and passive as a human family.

I also imagined their return home. Would they feel represented, and equally important and understood? Would their pleas and prayers be answered? Did anyone care enough to help?

I am reminded of the words of St. Vincent de Paul, “Your heart must not think one thing while your mouth says another.” This rests and nudges deeply on my heart and soul.

Hope

On the morning when the news broke of the Vatican’s decision to reject the Doctrine of Discovery, emails filled my inbox from Catholic NGO colleagues. That morning, during a committee meeting focusing on migration, a new mentor and friend lit up with hope and optimism, as she celebrated the news from Rome.

All the advocacy, prayers, letters, and tears that led to this decision gave hope, not just for the focus on the Indigenous communities, but also on our role as asking, pleading, and at times, demanding our Church and governments to respond with justice and love. My colleagues looked at each other with joy and hope. It was as if they were saying, “Our care, our work, it matters—it does make a difference.”

As I continue to learn and live through a year at the United Nations, I question if governments and stakeholders truly care enough to change policies, law, and cultures, shifting their attention to the marginalized, and leading with justice instead of power and control.

On this day, I saw the hope in the eyes and hearts of my colleagues. It was a small victory among hundreds of years of cruelty and suffering. The implications and its future remain unknown, but the gospel call to be a leading voice for justice and love never felt more important and necessary.

Committee Updates

Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH)

This upcoming summer and fall, there will be special attention on homelessness at the High Level Political Forum (July) and General Assembly (September). The hope is that countries will prioritize their care for those who lack stable housing by first, collecting and reporting accurate data on their population, and second, by providing innovative and practical resources and solutions in collaboration with partner organizations and

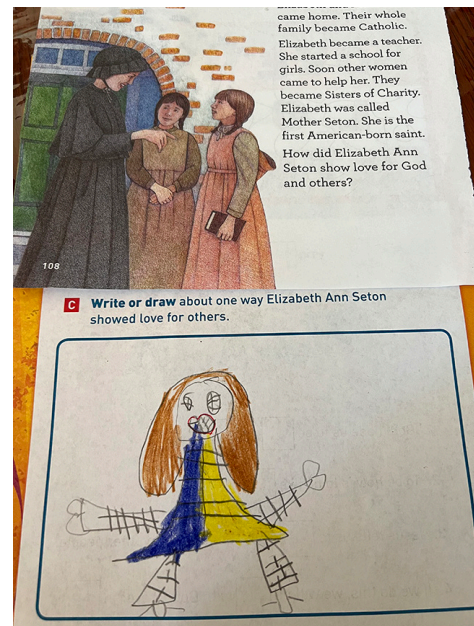
communities. There will be a special focus on World Homeless Day on Oct.10, 2023.

Financing for Development Forum

The Sisters of Charity Federation co-sponsored two side events in April, focusing on digital currency and equality, and best practices and innovations in climate finance. Both events welcomed a diverse panel of experts and fostered conversation between governments and NGO representatives.

Social Media

Please continue to follow @ngoscfederation on Twitter and Facebook for updates on areas of interest and advocacy. Also visit the Justice Coalition of Religious at www.jcor2030.org for resources and updates.



A Note from Shea and Lily’s Dad

As you likely know by now, I am also a proud dad of two beautiful young girls, Shea (6) and Lily (almost 3). Earlier this month, Shea learned about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in her first grade class, and you can see an image of her drawing of how to love like Mother Seton.

I was touched how Shea drew a heart as the mouth of Mother Seton.

Shea was proud to share with her teacher and classmates about her dad who represented Mother Seton and the Vincentian charism (she probably used different words) at the UN. What mattered most was that she knew we, as a family, tried to live and love as Jesus did as well as our Vincentian heroes and heroines. She also is learning (as we are, too), how to better care for and love those in our midst, especially those who could use a friend, including our beloved earth.