

## JUST ONE MORE THING

My father loved the Detective Colombo TV series. He would chuckle every time Colombo did that characteristic “Just One More Thing” after a conversation had apparently ended.

This is a “just one more thing” moment. As I will soon be leaving my role at the United Nations, I would like to share a final thought.

But first I must say it has been the honor of a lifetime to represent the Congregation of the Mission at the UN for the past five years. An undeserved honor but a role I have tried to carry out with the dignity and respect the congregation deserves.

Another privilege this work afforded was to work alongside wonderful NGOs from other branches of the Vincentian Family (Family) who were a constant source of inspiration.

I believe the CM should be present and active at the UN. Like all branches of the Family, confreres have a story to tell, a powerful story about the struggles of real people in the 96 countries where the CM ministers. People considered—and treated—as the Last and the Least among us. People in poverty, uninvited to the tables of power and decision-making, their input into solutions very rarely requested even though they know what must be done. It is a story not from theory or university study but from personal contact, personal involvement with people in poverty. People evangelized who in turn evangelize from the depths of their need, their generosity, their utter dependence on God.

Our Family knows these individuals well. And the story needs to be told in places of power, and people in power need to hear this story because otherwise they live and move in a closed bubble of documents and diplomatic protocols that preclude a real understanding of what happens daily at the grassroots level.

They need help to *keep it real*. And at times they will even admit it! In terms of the 2030 Agenda for People and the Planet, the 17 sustainable development goals, ambassadors and UN officials will sometimes admit that they need “civil society” input because the grassroots communities NGOs represent know best what solutions work or not at the all-important local level.

In one song the rock group The Eagles sing “Things in this life change very slowly...if they ever change at all.” Thankfully that is not true on every issue in every context, but it is true at the UN. Change is hard at institutions so complex and slow, filled with the competing priorities of the 193 countries’ own narrower interests.

But change is possible there, as the Working Group to End Homelessness has shown in its two resolutions passed by the General Assembly, one lifting the issue of H to be treated as its own stand-alone issue, the other requiring the Secretary General to present biannual reports on progress addressing the problem. Even if some Member States prefer to speak only of “housing,” homelessness is now firmly on the UN’s agenda.

*What must be Done* is always the Vincentian question in the face of issues affecting people in poverty. I have a conviction that readers may take—or reject—for what it’s worth. Our Vincentian Family should be justifiably proud of our 400+ year legacy of wonderful charitable work. In that regard we have certainly followed St. Vincent the Patron of Charity.

But as inequality (“the source of all social ills” for Pope Francis) spreads like a virus and abject poverty stubbornly continues to plague humanity, there is a clear need to embrace justice more fully. Justice, a kind of social charity. That other side of the coin from charity for Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Non-partisan but yes *political* advocacy. And systemic change as our preferred pastoral method, a way to bring hope to those trapped in poverty by offering a way for them to address and change the systems that keep them poor. Good work was done for many years to present this methodology to the Family, but who speaks of it now? What has happened to this priority?

In closing, I wish the new UN NGO representative of the CM every success. Let us all support him and respond enthusiastically to his efforts to involve us in this important work. Together let’s make justice “flow like a river....”

Jim Claffey

UN NGO representative of the Vincentian Priests and Brothers