

The United Nations: Talk or Action?

If people were asked what the United Nations is all about, a majority might say "they discuss things, than set up committees to discuss it all again."

Not this September. The UN invites us to an Action Week September 18-26, a week of concentrated global action for People and the Planet.

Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. But not without some help in bending it that way! So too the Global Week to act for a better future: one that is more equal, more active on climate change, one that seeks to end poverty, and protects health.

These goals will take serious "bending" to accomplish, or as the UN says "To Turn It Around" for the sake of humankind. The goals are enshrined in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set out by the UN as the world's "2030 Agenda."

The Action Week next month presents a challenge to our creativity: how to share with others a critical agenda of life-giving, and life-saving, issues in the middle of a pandemic where everything is done virtually. But creativity in doing good, and doing it well, is in our DNA: St. Vincent de Paul reminds us that love is creative even to infinity.

Realistically what might we do?

How about beginning a plastic "fast"? Plastic, one of the most useful inventions ever, has reached an almost equal downside. Four hundred million tons are produced annually, yet less than 18% is actually recycled. And the current pandemic is only exacerbating the problem as disposable packaging for take-out and grocery shopping increases in the effort to keep infections low. We know about the island of plastic floating in the Pacific, and we hear plastic is seeping into the food chain, but we cannot seem to meaningfully curb its use.

Everyone googles. We could look up the 17 SDGs and the brief compelling text of each, and discuss in depth the one that most gets our attention with family and friends, or people in our ministry, beginning discussions that need to happen if we are to Turn It Around for People and the Planet.

Social Media are everywhere. We could use these platforms to #Act4SDGs, spreading the word about goals that seem to belong to a perfect world, but are

totally achievable if people on the ground work collectively. Maybe leaders will follow!

Poverty cannot be eliminated until everyone is "homed." Since global homelessness is the current focus of the worldwide Vincentian Family, we might investigate what our city or community is doing about human beings—even families—"rough sleeping" on our streets. And then find a way to speak up about it.

If we take seriously this UN Call to Action Week, it could put us on a path towards that better future. All it takes is a little "bending" to Turn It Around.

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