

recently reiterated the Holy See's esteem and appreciation for the United Nations as an indispensable means of building an authentic family of peoples. The Holy See values the efforts of this distinguished institution "to ensure world peace, respect for human dignity, the protection of persons, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and harmonious economic and social development" (Pietro Cardinal Parolin, Secretary of State on behalf of Pope Francis, addressing the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly September 29, 2014). However, just as consistent but far less known is the Church's recognition of the indispensable role of UN NGO ministry. In his October 2, 1979, New York address, Pope John Paul II explicitly acknowledges the need for this ministry and describes it as a two-way dialogue relationship: "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 nongovernmental 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 . . ."

The pope's above description of the NGO two-way dialogical relationship with the UN corresponds to the two major types of NGOs—those associated with the Department of Public Information (DPI), communicating from the UN to the people; and those associated with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), communicating from the people to the UN. The Augustinians now enjoy both DPI and ECOSOC association as a faith-based NGO.

Of course what is said of the UN NGO ministry applies to that of the Augustinians as well. But far beyond that, Augustine's life and works bear a profound affinity with the UN system as it impacts all levels of human life—local, national and world. The multilevel character of the UN system is anticipated by Augustine's observation, "Because every man [*sic*] is a neighbor to all men [*sic*], one should not allow any kind of distance where there is common human nature" (En. In ps. 118, 8, 2). This concise observation of Augustine expresses an ideal he constantly held and actively embraced: a life in community that is simultaneously local, national and world—a

MULTILEVEL COMMUNITY WITNESSING

Augustinians International

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Introduction

The Augustinians have officially established an association with the United Nations as a nongovernmental organization, opening to the Augustinian family a two-way dialogue relationship with the UN. By undertaking this UN ministry, as many other religiously inspired NGOs have done, the Augustinians have taken a significant step toward Second Vatican Council renewal. In accord with Vatican II's 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, this UN ministry can bring us more deeply into "the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of this age." Also in accord with Vatican II renewal, this UN ministry can occasion a more faithful return to our original charism, particularly to a more fully authentic community life as was lived by St. Augustine himself.

UN NGO Ministry

It is well known that Church documents have consistently recognized the "indispensable" role of the United Nations in the modern world. In continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis

patristic foreshadowing of the magisterium's development that in the modern world the social question has reached worldwide importance without losing either local or national relevance.

Augustinian Spirituality: Living Multilevel Community

At the heart of Augustinian spirituality is life in common modeled after the ancient Christian community witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42 and 4:32–35). This ancient community was faithful to the apostles' teaching and the breaking of bread, they held all goods in common, and all members enjoyed fellowship of one heart and one mind in God. This even today characterizes the core values of the Augustinian charism that can be named simply as Truth, Unity, Love—*Veritas, Unitas, Caritas*.

This fundamental insight into the Augustinian charism is beyond controversy; whether it is practiced by vowed religious or by lay members or collaborators of the Augustinian family, it is faithful to the charism each in their own way. But particularly in our modern world and in response to calls for Church renewal, we would do well to return to Augustine's full understanding of community to retrieve his multilevel approach so as to put it into practice.

It has been noted that Jesus uses similar tripartite levels in his salvation narratives. Salvation has come to this house in the case of his visit to Zacchaeus and his household (Luke 19:9). Cities and nations are judged: “woe to you Charozin”; “woe to you Bethsaida” (Matthew 11:21). Consider also the last judgment narrative of Matthew 25:32–45 and the “great commission” (Matthew 28:19) to go to the whole world which lies at the heart of Vatican II. We would do well to accept the challenge of living in community on local, national, and world levels. For as Augustine said: “After the city or town is the world, cited by philosophers as the third level of human society. The philosophers start with the household, go on to the city and finally come upon the world. And just as it is with dangers of the sea, the bigger the community, the more trouble there is” (*City of God* 19:7).

The multilevel community aspect of Augustinian spirituality takes on a more urgent relevance in our present age as the social question takes on a truly worldwide character. Pope Paul VI brings this insight into explicit awareness in 1967: “Today it is most important for people to understand and appreciate that the social question ties all men together, in every part of the world. In the first place a possible misunderstanding has to be eliminated. Recognition that the ‘social question’ has assumed a worldwide dimension does not at all mean that it has lost its incisiveness or its national and local importance. On the contrary, it means that the problems in industrial enterprises or in the workers and union movements of a particular country or region are not to be considered as isolated cases with no connection. On the contrary, they depend more and more on the influence of factors beyond regional boundaries and national frontiers.” This calls for the living out of the principles of solidarity as John Paul II emphasized in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39, 40. Indeed, Augustine explicitly includes the world's entirety in an extended offer to all toward community.

Augustinian UN NGO Ministry: Empowering Multilevel Community

Living community on just one level is a daunting task for so many issues, so many complexities, and so many limitations bear upon us. Moreover, the level of “world” is especially challenging. Augustine in *City of God* 19:7 cited above uses the dangers of the vast sea as a metaphor to illustrate the grave scope of world problems. He then immediately warns us that if we do not overcome our world's diversity of languages so as to begin speaking with each other with real human communication, then real human neighborliness would be impossible in spite of our common human nature. Yet each level of community—local, national, world—does actually relate to the other two, and upon reflection, we can gain insight into their mutual interaction. Thus, living multilevel community is still our ideal and still even a practical reality to strive for.

This responsibility of multilevel community is precisely why the Augustinian UN NGO ministry with its two-way dialogical relationship is a providential blessing. This ministry has been

established to empower Augustinians throughout the world to live more effectively on the world level as well as on the local and the national. Put in other words, it is true that the UN has enormous resources that can and do benefit us. Yet we are not at the UN only to take advantage of these resources. It is also true that the UN benefits greatly from its many associated NGOs. Yet we are not there simply for what we can do for the UN. Nor is UN NGO ministry a work done by others to whom we can transfer our world responsibilities and thus avoid dealing with them. On the contrary, it is through UN NGO ministry that we do whatever we do with, for, and in Church and world with more powerful apostolic and operational effectiveness. As asserted in the “Introduction” above, this UN ministry can occasion a more faithful return to our original charism, particularly to a more fully authentic community life as lived by St. Augustine himself.

Augustinian UN NGO Ministry: A Work In Progress

Consistent with John Paul II’s words to NGOs cited above, it is the “privileged task” of the Augustinian UN NGO to maintain the two-way dialogue between the UN and the people. The UN is an enormous treasury of resources for all the earth’s people in their homes, their cities, their countries, and their world. Through our NGO ministry, the UN can effectively speak with them. And the people themselves have much to say. Through our NGO ministry, they can effectively speak to the UN. The present state of this dialogue can be found on the Augustinian UN NGO website augustinians-un.org, a site that makes detailed examples here unnecessary. But we may note that conversation has begun with the World Tourism Organization (WTO) on human trafficking, with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) on disaster response, and with the World Food Program (WFP) on hunger. Conversation has begun with the offering of several of our projects to the world community as best practices, with some of our elementary schools using the UN’s education resource CyberSchoolBus, with NGO collaboration in psychology, farming,

and engineering. This two-way dialogue will take time to develop and mature. It is still a work in progress, but it is already well begun. May its good beginning be an invitation for all to participate. New York UN Headquarters is the on-site location of this UN NGO ministry and is under the leadership of our main representative, being at the time of this writing Rev. Emeka Obiezu, OSA, assisted by staff including volunteers. It is supported by an extended NGO team present in several countries. The activities of this ministry are guided by three priorities—education, development, human rights—terms chosen because of their relevance to Augustinian ministry worldwide, their honored and well understood meaning in international settings, and their correspondence to the Augustinian core values of Truth, Unity, Love.