

SESSION VI: LAY DOMINICAN COMMUNITY IN PRACTICE

Josephine Kelly

OVERVIEW

I. *Opening Prayer*

If the session is preceded by Liturgy of the Hours or the Eucharist, then a decade of the Rosary should be prayed. If it is not, then the appropriate hour of the Office should be prayed.

II. *Goal Statement*

- A. Mention what was covered in previous sessions.
- B. Give brief overview of what will be covered in this session.

III. *Formal Presentation*

IV. *Prepared Discussion Questions*

- A. Should be concise and to the point.
- B. Should highlight the points mentioned in the goal statement.

V. *Closing Prayer*

The Salve and O Lumen should be said in English and the postulants should be given the English words and the Latin version with the appropriate music.

OUTLINE

I. Goal Statement

II. Definition of Chapter/Community

- A. Common life
- B. Shared commitment to community
- C. Structure and democratic representation
- D. Chapter Meeting - All members are an integral part
- E. Fraternal love

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III. Community Life

A. Centered Around Chapter

1. Freedom to help others
2. Witness of life

B. Benefits and Obligations as a member of the Dominican Family

C. Interaction with other Dominicans

1. Within own Chapter
2. With other branches of the Dominican Family
 - a. Find ways to show concern and interest
 - b. Participate in Dominican Family Days
 - c. Sponsor (or attend) events open to all members of the

Family.

IV. Conclusion

V. Discussion Questions

VI. Bibliography

GOAL STATEMENT

In previous presentations we learned about the Spirit and Aims of St. Dominic and that Prayer and Study go hand in hand. We also learned that the active life of the apostolate rests on contemplation. We saw the theological background of community and how St. Dominic used this and made it an important part of the life of the Order.

FORMAL PRESENTATION

The goal of this presentation is to familiarize the inquiry-stage Postulant with the concept of community as it is lived by the Lay Dominican.

A brief explanation of what a Lay Dominican Chapter is and why the Chapter meeting is an essential part of Lay Dominican life will be included. The benefits and responsibilities of membership in the Lay Branch of the Dominican Family and the interaction of the various branches of the Family will be studied as well.

In the preamble of the General Principles of Lay Dominican Life drawn up by the National Council of Lay Dominicans in 1982 it states, "Today, as in times past, the whole Dominican Family shares actively in the charism of Dominic, in his love of the Word of God, understood in all of its radical originality. We face this Word together in our common life, we study it, celebrate liturgically, and bear witness to it." [1]

Common life is a term that may seem strange to some people, but it is a very important part of Dominican life. The Rule of St. Augustine, which is the Rule of the Dominican Order states, "Call not anything your own, but let all things be held in common among you." The practical application of this statement is very different for the friar or religious and for us as lay men and women. For us, our chapter is our community. This chapter is a community of people drawn together in love and finds its roots and its reason for being in the Gospel and in Dominic's response to the Gospel.

Our Dominican-ness is not something we can put on and take off at will. It is rather a way of being a Christian; a way that permeates everything we do, whether it be prayer, study, recreation, or apostolic work. I think for too long many of us did not give much thought to what it meant to be a Dominican, but rather thought of ourselves as members of the Dominican Order, with all of the concomitant privileges and obligations. Today we are called to live our Dominican vocation, not in the quiet of a cloister or our own homes, but in the hustle and bustle of the work-a-day world.

What is community? How do we live it? What makes Lay Dominican community life unique? These are some questions a person interested in joining the Lay Dominicans might ask.

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As has been mentioned previously, all of us live in community with other people - whether it be our own family, our parish community or our Dominican Family community - and we are called to reach out to them, to support them and to do for them.

Here we are primarily concerned with the concept of Lay Dominican Community or Chapter as it is more commonly called. The Constitutions of the Friars define Lay Dominican Chapters as "associations of lay people who joined together by a special gift of God in the Apostolic Spirit of St. Dominic, aim to achieve their salvation and that of others by profession of the evangelical life according to the form of living in the world adapted by the Order and formally approved for their states of life." [2]

This definition shows what we are supposed to be, as seen by the Friars. Right now we are more concerned with **how** we are to be Dominican -how we as members of a Lay Dominican Chapter are to live out our vocation.

I think in order to really delve into this question of "How we are going to live out this life", we have to take a look at some of the basics. In previous sessions we looked at Dominican life as being a holistic response to the Gospel, and the last presentation focused on the theology of community and the fact that this community and our commitment to community is the source from which our apostolate flows. In this session we are looking at the Lay Dominican Chapter as a Community. How does it help us live our life?

We can look at the chapter and realize that it has a certain structure. "It is an association ... ", as the Constitutions of the Fathers said, "... of Lay people who are joined together ... " Yes, it is an association of people, yet it also has an identity which is separate from that of the people that make it up. For the most part, it existed before the members who currently belong to it, and it will probably exist after they are gone. Therefore, it is an institution that has a definite structure. It is related to other chapters within a geographic area in a region, and in association with other regions into a province and in association with other provinces on a national level and also it is related to the Order as a whole. There is democratic representation on each of these levels, so that all members are represented.

The Chapter meeting, usually held once a month, is one way that the spirit of community can be expressed. But our sense of community, and our actual

living out of that community can't only be limited to that meeting. We have to be willing and ready to share the gifts and talents we have received with the other members of the Chapter. We have to be willing to do this even if it requires sacrifices at times for the good of the Chapter and of the Order. Our brothers and sisters within the Chapter have a right to expect that we will help them when they are in need, whether this help be material or spiritual help or just listening to them if they need to talk, or actually trying to give some kind of direction in an area where we may be more knowledgeable than they are. It might also mean at times giving financial help, and possibly at some sacrifice. We also have an obligation to the Order as a whole to put our gifts and talents at their disposal.

There is a quote from the Dialogues of St. Catherine where God the Father tells Catherine "...you cannot give me the kind of love I ask of you. This is why I have put you among your neighbors; so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me - that is, love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me. (Mt. 25:40)

My Truth demonstrated this when Paul was persecuting me and he said "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4) For he considered Paul's persecution of my faithful ones as persecution of me. So your love should be sincere. You should love your neighbors with the same love with which you love Me."^[3]

I think this holds true for us and we have to be able to show this love for one another. I think the longer we are in the Order the more we come to realize that Community is important. **We need each other.** And we have to be free enough to express this need and to know that there will be a loving response from the members of our Chapter. Also, along with this response, I think we have to come to the realization that, as members of the Chapter, each of us have a responsibility to the Chapter as a whole and to each and every member of the Chapter individually, and that when we absent ourselves from a meeting, this absence is felt by all the members of the Chapter. Therefore, we should make every effort to attend the monthly Chapter meeting. If we let all sorts of other things take precedence over this meeting, where is our commitment to the Chapter and to the Order?

We also, by virtue of our community life, have a freedom to help others. This is not something which is imposed on us from above, but rather is an outgrowth of our community life and our prayer life. This freedom to help others may flower in the many and varied ministries in which Lay

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Dominicans are engaged. There will always be a tension between the needs/desires of the individual members and the Chapter as a whole; between personal freedom and community spirit. This is something that we have to recognize and accept and work with to bring about the greater good for all.

Up to now in this presentation I have spoken about the Chapter as a structure, and the relationship of one member to another. Now I would like to talk about the Chapter as the centre for development of the spiritual life within each member.

Just as we come together as a group to pray, to share with one another what has been going on in our lives, so also an integral part of this chapter meeting is some form of study and/or instruction. For example: Scripture Study or a session on Liturgy of the Hours, or the Documents of Vatican II or the Life of St. Dominic. Instruction can also be given by the Moderator or Director of the Chapter on some aspect of Dominican life.

The Documents of Vatican II place great emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church and the influence the laity can have in their workplace.

"Following Jesus who was poor, they are neither depressed by the lack of temporal goods nor puffed up by their abundance. Imitating Christ who was humble, they have no obsession for empty honours (cf Gal. 5:26) but seek to please God rather than men, ever ready to leave all things for Christ's sake (Luke 14:26) and to suffer persecution for justice' sake (cf Mt. 5:10). for they remember the words of the Lord, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mt. 16:24) Promoting Christian friendship among themselves, they help one another in any ' kind of necessity.[4]

"Since in our times variations of materialism are rampant everywhere even among Catholics, the laity should not only learn doctrine more carefully, especially those main points which are the subjects of controversy, but all should also provide the witness of an evangelical life in contrast to all forms of materialism."[5]

I think these quotations point out something we have heard many times, yet I don' t think we really believe it. We have to become more aware of the fact that by our example we can make a difference in our sphere of influence and

that we have to use this power for the good of our neighbours and the good of the Church.

We have spoken of the Chapter as the centre for our spiritual development as Lay Dominicans. Another important aspect of our development as Dominicans is our appreciation of the benefits and obligations of being a member of the Dominican Family. We are given certain aids to help us grow in holiness. We listen to the Word of God in our reading of Sacred Scripture and we celebrate this Word in the Liturgy. We try to foster a deeper devotion to Mary as the Mother of the Word Incarnate and our Mother also. Since we are all members of one Family, we prayerfully remember the deceased members in our daily prayer, and in a special way on the Anniversaries.

Since the terminology First, Second and Third Orders is no longer used, and in order to promote the concept of the Dominican Family, there have been set up Dominican Family Days where **all** members of the Family can come together to celebrate their unity and diversity. We should make every effort to support and attend this type of function, so as to get to know members in the other branches of our diverse and varied Family.

Conclusion

As you can see from the foregoing, the Lay Dominican Chapter meeting is both a place where we can get to know the other members of Dominic's family and a way to grow in holiness by sharing prayer, Eucharist and the Word.

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1. International Dominican Information (IDI), March-April 1984, p. 58.
 2. Ordinations and Declarations of the General Chapter, Bologna, December 1983, #149.
 3. Noffke, Suzanne, O.P., Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue, #64, p. 121.
 4. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Chapter 1, #4, p. 494.
 5. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Chapter 6, #31A, p. 519.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to belong to a Chapter?
2. What benefits can you draw from Chapter life.
3. How does one show love for one another within the Chapter?
4. Do you see your Chapter building Community? How do you think you can help?

Bibliography

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Hinnebusch, William A., O.P., *The Dominicans - A Short History*

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Noffke, Suzanne, O.P. (Tr.), *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*

Tugwell, Simon, O.P. (Ed.), *Early Dominicans Selected Writings*

Weber, Richard, O.P. et al., *Dominican Laity History, Purpose & Spirituality the Bologna Document on the Dominican Family.*

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Flannery, Austin, O.P., *Vatican Council II Documents, especially The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*

Prayers said after compline

Prayer to the Blessed Mother

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To you we cry, poor, banished children of Eve; to you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn, then, most gracious Advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us. And after this, our exile, show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Make me worthy to praise you, O sacred Virgin.

R. Give me strength against your enemies.

Let us pray: We seek from you, O Lord, the favour that we, your servants, may find joy in continual health of mind and body. By the wonderful intercession of blessed Mary, ever a virgin may we be delivered from sorrow into the joy of eternal happiness. Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Prayer to St. Dominic

Light of the Church, Doctor of truth, Rose of patience, Ivory of chastity, you who have freely dispensed the waters of wisdom, Preacher of grace, unite us with the blessed.

V. Pray for us, blessed Father Dominic.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we are burdened with the weight of our sins. We ask that you relieve us of this burden through the intercession of blessed Dominic, your confessor and our Father. Through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

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SALVE REGINA

Sal- ve, Re- gi- na, ma- ter mi- se- ri- córdi- a:
Vi- ta, dul- cé- do et spes nostra, sal- ve. Ad
te clamá- mus éxsu- les fi- li- i He- vae. Ad te suspi- rá-
mus, gemén- tes et fien- tes in hac lacrimá- rum val- le. E- ia
ergo, advo- cá- ta nostra, il- los tu- os mi- se- ri- cór-
des ó- cu- los ad nos con- vér- te. Et Je- sum, bene- dí- ctum
fructum ventris tu- i, no- bis post hoc exs- li- um os- tén-
de. O cle- mens, O pi- a, O dulcis
Virgo Ma- ri- a. T. P. Alle- lú- ia.

O LUMEN

vi
O lu-men Ecclé-si-æ, Do-ctor ve-ri-
tá-tis, Ro-sa pa-ti-én-ti-æ, E-bur ca-sti-
tá-tis, A-quam sa-pi-é-n-ti-æ propi-ná-sti gra-tis:
Præ-di-cá-tor grá-ti-æ, nos jun-ge be-á-tis.
F. P. Al-Je-lú-ia.

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