

POSSIBLE OPTIONS
for
RECONFIGURATION
of
DOMINICAN CLUSTER CONGREGATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning was the Word....

Over long months, we have spoken words with one another. In our September meetings (Columbus and New Orleans) we shared from the depths of our hearts. Here is some of what we said about why we want to reconfigure:

MISSION is the priority, the passion, the flame for reconfiguration.

We want to be able to speak truth publicly with one voice

We want to be on the margins, in the places of most need

We want to be credible and relevant to the needs of these times

We want to strengthen our connections with the internationality of the Order

We want to take responsibility for the future of Dominican mission

We want to nourish and mentor new life

In what we create for the future, we want to be able to challenge ourselves and one another to

- balance structure, spirit, action and contemplation
- put the common good before our own
- live sustainably and simply in all aspects of our life
- cherish all forms of cultural diversity among us:
rural and urban, ethnic, geographical, and the
unique culture of each congregation
- strengthen relationships, thinking of one another as family,
not guests
- take risks to achieve our goals

The Cluster has to be about renewal, not just survival.... Maybe we need to look back at the basics of the four pillars of Dominican life – prayer, study, community, service- and see how they can be renewed and make our preaching more viable and audible to our world.

Margaret Ormond, OP: “Second Letter” p. 2

The four options, A-B-C-D, are offered for your prayer and reflection. You may surface additional strengths and limitation/challenges; your insights are important to all of the members of the Custer Congregations as we consider each of the options at our February 18-20, 2005 Inter-congregational Assembly in St. Louis.

Let us place all of our experiences, our failures, and our accomplishments at the base of this new configuration and strive to be in our day what Dominic was in his – **preachers of grace and Gospel people of prayer.**

Margaret Ormond, OP: “Second Letter” p. 2

As we reflect on the following options for reconfiguration, let us ponder how well each option will help us in creating what we most desire for mission in light of personnel and other resources now and in the future.

01-13-2005

Defining terms for clarity

UNION *Two or more congregations give up their distinct identities to form a new institute with a new name, a new constitution, and a new government structure.* Margaret Gallagher, S.C. “The Future of Small Institutes Merging and Other Issues” Canon Law Society of America Proceedings 57 1995 p.210

MERGER *A process in which an institute, usually a fairly small one, joins another in such a way that the former is incorporated into the latter, adopting its name, constitution, its form of government, etc. In other words one institute has disappeared juridically although its houses and works may be maintained.* Margaret Gallagher, S.C. “The Future of Small Institutes Merging and Other Issues” Canon Law Society of America Proceedings 57 1995 p.210

FEDERATION *A higher level legal entity with each institute retaining its current legal existence and its professed members “as is.” The new umbrella juridic person of the federation is legally created as comprising the various institutes as such (not the members of the institute). ...A federation has its own legal identity and functions and officers according to its own statutes but those in governance positions in a federation do not have legal authority within the institutes that comprise it.* Elizabeth McDonough, O.P., J.C.D. “Mergers, Unions, Federations and Confederation” Review for Religious 63.2 2004 p.209-210

CONFEDERATION *A term used to refer to an even larger umbrella grouping of already existing federations, with the confederation being established for fostering cooperation and mutual assistance but with any actual authority of the officers in relation to the member entities being carefully circumscribed by appropriate statutes.* Elizabeth McDonough, O.P., J.C.D. “Mergers, Unions, Federations and Confederation” Review for Religious 63.2 2004 p.210

OPTION A

New Canonical Union with Regions

DESCRIPTION:

Seven congregations form one congregation (union) with regions

COMPONENTS and RELATIONSHIPS

1. Central Leadership and central office for entire congregation: Prioress, General Council (4)
2. Regional Leadership teams elected by members of each region
3. Local leadership: local communities determine who will be contact person and treasurer
4. The following are appointed by the central leadership team: General Treasurer, Vocation Minister, Formation Minister, Peace, Justice, and Care of Creation Promoter, Preaching Promoter, Communicator, Development Director, Coordinators of Skilled Care Facilities, and Archivist, etc

LEADERSHIP

1. Regional members elect chapter delegates who elect the Central Leadership Team
2. The Regional Leadership Teams are elected by members of the region
3. The Regional Leadership Teams meet with the Central Leadership Team at least twice a year
4. The Regional Leadership Teams meet with members of their own region at least quarterly
5. A member of the Regional Leadership Team is in regular contact with regional members

IMPLICATIONS (Strengths/Limitations):

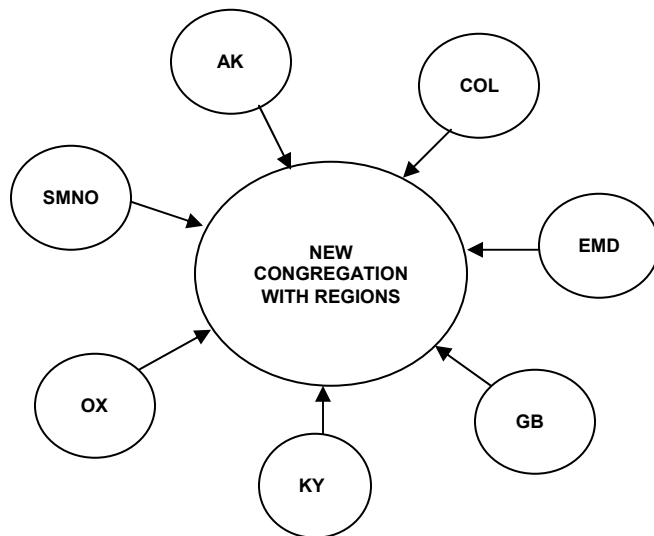
Strengths

1. The number of elected leaders would be reduced.
2. The number of sisters in internal ministries would be reduced
3. Administrative personnel (finances, development, etc) would be reduced
4. New opportunities for collaboration
5. Regions provide for small groupings for personal interaction and bonding
6. Strengthens mission focus

Limitations/Challenges

1. Loss of congregational identity
2. Relating to people in leadership whom we may not know
3. Developing a new constitution and mode of operation

IMAGE:



OPTION A
(over)

OPTION A

Observations – Option A

Sr. Christine Rody, SC, JCL
Canonical Consultant

Since this is a canonical union, each community needs to submit the information required by the Congregation for Religious as well as a copy of the new constitution governing the new entity. I presume you have that list of requirements (short history of each, request for union, list of members, etc.).

OPTION B

Eventual Formation of an 8th Congregation

DESCRIPTION:

The 7 Cluster congregations give “birth” to an eighth canonical congregation composed of women who have discerned a call to this new congregation and who share a common understanding and commitment to prayer, study, community life, and ministry as they search to form Dominican life for the 21st Century.

COMPONENTS and RELATIONSHIPS:

A transition team of Cluster congregations formed from leadership of each Cluster congregation to midwife the formation of a new canonical congregation with civil incorporation

LEADERSHIP:

1. This new congregation would elect a leader who is accountable to the transition team until they can apply for canonical status as a congregation
2. Transition team
3. Coordinator of the envisioned eighth (8th) congregation
4. Government of the 7 congregations receives vows of new members until congregational status received

IMPLICATIONS (Strengths/Limitations):

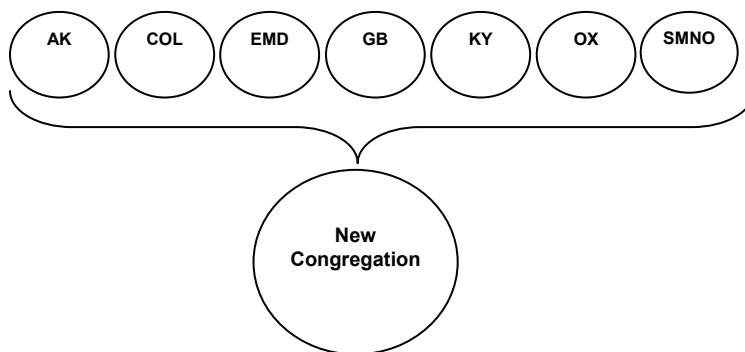
Strengths

1. Simultaneously respond to needs of the elders and newer/younger members
2. No immediate canonical change needed for the seven (7) congregations

Limitations/Challenges:

1. Will require all to risk letting go of what is most dear to create something new
2. This shift will require commitment of a critical mass

IMAGE:



OPTION B

Observations – Option B

Sr. Christine Rody, SC, JCL
Canonical Consultant

I realize that this is a working model and many of the details are not yet set to paper, but looking at what is in print I can make the following observations and ask a few questions.

1. It is unclear to which community's government leader a new member would profess vows. Since there is no canonical affiliation of the seven communities, there is no authority in the combined leadership.
2. Another question is, What constitution will govern this new entity?
3. The sisters who join this group technically cannot transfer because it is not yet established as a religious community. They would maintain the identity of their original community with their original commitment undisturbed since religious can form and join associations of the faithful. Once the new community has developed an independence from the originating congregations, it can follow the steps for becoming a public juridic person as a religious congregation as is indicated and transferring members would profess vows in the new congregation. Another possibility is that the transferring members can leave their congregations and technically not be religious during the formation of the new entity.
4. A possibility to create a more independent grouping is to ask a cooperating bishop to establish the group as a diocesan congregation. Then members of the originating congregations can transfer vows. The three-year probation period for a transferring would provide an attachment to the originating group yet allow the group to form. Any new members would profess vows within the new congregation. The new members would have no attachment to any of the originating congregations. When the group wishes and is sufficiently established it can apply for pontifical status. The possible difficulty that authority is transferred to the leadership of the new group under the direction of the diocesan bishop could be avoided in drawing up a document stating that the diocesan bishop places the development of this new community under the authority of the "transition team" that is created.

**OPTION C:
FEDERATION (with or without a canonical structure)**

DESCRIPTION:

Seven congregations form a federation to promote the mission of preaching and living the four pillars: prayer, study, common life, and ministry, more collaboratively. In a **canonical federation**, the seven congregations retain autonomy but come together to form a civil and canonical entity. In a **federation with no canonical structure**, there is no civil or canonical entity.

COMPONENTS and RELATIONSHIPS:

1. Establish structures for better collaboration and sharing the expertise available in the member congregations in areas of vocation/formation, younger members, peace, justice, and care of creation, preaching, education, study, ministry, common life, sponsored ministries, financial and property issues.
2. May take corporate stances on critical justice issues
3. May sponsor retreats or study days for members as well as a convocation at regular intervals
4. A canonical federation would draw up a charter and by-laws to be approved by members. In a non-canonical structure, there is no legal charter or by-laws.

LEADERSHIP

1. The seven congregations maintain their own government structures, including chapters and leadership teams.
2. Federation Leadership Team will be composed of one representative from each of the congregational leadership teams.
3. In a canonical federation, the Federation Leadership Team elects its own officers, which become the officers of the civil corporation.
4. In a federation with no canonical structure a chair of the Federation is chosen by the Federation Leadership Team.

IMPLICATIONS (Strengths/Limitations):

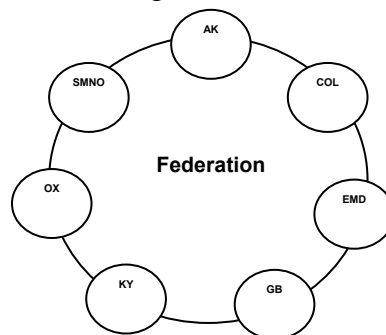
Strengths:

1. Each congregation retains its own autonomy but shares spirit and gifts of one another
2. Provides for deeper collaboration among member congregations
3. Will allow energies used in Cluster process to be directed toward enhancing Dominican mission
4. No sister changes her canonical membership in her congregation
5. Possibility of fewer members in congregational positions due to shared expertise

Limitations/Challenges:

1. Federation leadership team adds another level of leadership.
2. A federation might duplicate the purposes and activities of the Dominican Alliance and Dominican Sisters USA.
3. A federation does not address the shrinking pool of leadership, the problems of aging membership, and diminishing congregations
4. One member of each congregational leadership team will have to devote more time and energy to establish and nurture the federation.

IMAGE:



**MODEL C
(over)**

OPTION C

Observations – Option C

Sr. Christine Rody, SC, JCL

Canonical Consultant

There was no mention of the authority that the federation would have over member congregations. For example, if a member congregation would be judged by the federation unable to carry on its mission or be financially in trouble, or not have sufficient leadership personnel what authority would the federation have to step in? In the Limitations/Challenges section some of these issues are mentioned but not addressed.

OPTION D

Two new congregations (both canonical) are formed from the merger or the union of the 7 congregations (could be 2 unions, 2 mergers, or 1 union and 1 merger)

DESCRIPTION:

Two new congregations are formed through discernment. Each congregation determines whether it will be a union or a merger and who would go with whom. The new congregations could be formed in configurations of three/four congregations or two/five congregations or other variations.

COMPONENTS and RELATIONSHIPS

1. If a union is chosen the new congregation(s) elect leadership with representatives from the combined groupings.
2. The new congregation(s) may or may not choose to have regions
3. There may or may not be a formal relationship between the two new congregations

LEADERSHIP:

1. General Chapter is composed of elected delegates as specified by the constitutions
2. General Chapter elects the Prioress and leadership team

IMPLICATIONS (Strengths/Limitations):

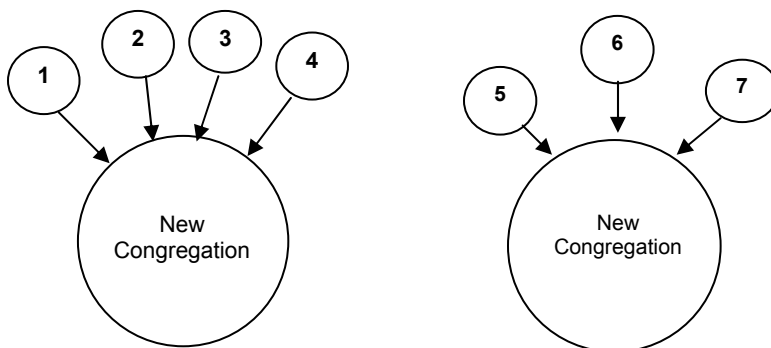
Strengths

1. Dealing with two smaller entities rather than one large entity
2. Easier to get to know population of smaller grouping
3. Creates more opportunity for peer interaction

Limitations/Challenges:

1. Given the actuarial projections, this option may not create sufficient vitality
2. Determining which congregations go together and on what basis this selection is made
3. Involves canonical change
4. If this is a merger, it involves dissolution of some and not of others

IMAGE:



**OPTION D
(over)**

OPTION D

Observations – Option D

Sr. Christine Rody, SC, JCL

Canonical Consultant

Is the selection of two rather than any other number of groupings arbitrary? It seems that breaking up the seven into smaller groupings would allow for different time lines. If some communities are ready sooner to begin the process they could while those not ready could continue the dialogue and also learn from the groups uniting before them.