



Discernment Cycle Four: Summer Congregational Meetings

This summer, the seven Cluster congregations held congregational meetings as the Fourth Cycle of the Cluster discernment process. While each had a different experience, all elected in the end to continue participation in the Cluster process.

New Orleans St. Mary

With a record 91% of the Sisters in attendance, Cycle Four of the Cluster Process got underway Saturday and Sunday, May 28 and 29, 2005, at the Dominican Conference Center in New Orleans. **Sr. Angeline Magro**, Prioress, welcomed and affirmed each Sister. In a reflective spirit, the Sisters viewed the common Power Point presentation that highlighted the Cluster Process. Commentary was given by **Srs. Waldia Warden** and **Dominic Savio Estorge**.

With our small congregation, about 34% of the Sisters actively participate in the Cluster sub-committees. Round-table discussion on personal experiences, therefore, included much positive shar-

ing. Affirmations about the Sisters' experiences indicated that most were pleased with the process, yet some questioned the necessity of the number of meetings and expenses.

Sr. Janet Roesener, CSJ, facilitator, directed the sisters in their reflections on the three revised options for reconfiguration. Janet was careful to explain that this part of the process was a sharing of reflections and not a leaning on any one of them. Different opinions were shared and feelings both negative and positive were expressed as the Sisters discussed the options. After clarifications and further explanations, most Sisters accepted that they could disagree and remain friends.

By Sunday, we were ready to look at the possibilities and implications for our congregation and all the Cluster congregations.

Two possibilities emerged, the first, remaining in the Cluster Journey, and the second, to stay as we are – Dominican

May 28-29, 2005



Srs. M. Sheila Burson and Lorraine Torres enjoy a break.

Sisters, St. Mary in New Orleans. Again, feelings were expressed during the discussions. After clarification, the leaning was taken. For the first possibility (remaining in the Cluster process), 27 raised green cards, 11 raised yellow cards; no red cards were raised. For the second possibility (to stay as we are), the result was 2 green cards, 15 yellow cards, and 21 red cards. Although the sisters experienced differing opinions and perspectives, they consider themselves blessed and challenged to continue discerning the future of St. Mary's Dominican Congregation.

Sr. M. Terese Mittelbronn laughs heartily with Srs. Dorothy Dawes and Joan Arceneaux.

New Orleans Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic

June 3-6, 2005

Thirty-three of the thirty-five Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic attended our annual summer assembly in the auditorium at Our Lady of Wisdom, an inter-congregational healthcare facility where three EMDs live, June 3-6. Liturgical leadership by Great Bend **Sr. Amy McFrederick** and facilitation by Sr. Janet Roesener, CSJ, kept us focused between our gathering ritual Friday evening and updating on community business Monday afternoon.

The Cluster process spanned all day Saturday and half of Sunday. Our experience of the Cluster Journey ranges from delight in experiencing our similarities, to energy from new relationships, to grieving, to feelings of isolation and anguish. As we look to the future, we hope there will be: sensitivity to the cultural roots

of each congregation; a

commitment to midwifing a totally new form of Dominican life for the 21st century; a way to share our Eucharistic Mission that has enabled our unity within much cultural diversity; respect for the wide range of motivations and levels of commitment to the Cluster; such passion for our union in the essentials that we can hold on more lightly to the negotiables; a realization that others our age are experiencing their own life-renovating transitions; and the graced awareness that God is with us personally no matter the decision.

Over three fourths of our congregation strongly affirmed remaining on the Cluster journey. Among those who gave little or no support to this process, a few asked for more time to discuss how the Eucharistic Mission could be integrated within the Dominican charism.

Sunday afternoon many of our Associates from near and far joined us to watch "Celebrate What's Right with the World" and to welcome six new Associates during the Sunday Eucharist. Following a potluck, we honored **Paula Richard, OP**, and associate **Louis Aguirre**, who were the editors of our periodical "Highways



Srs. Maria Teresa Apalategui and Diane McOsker take a break from the business meeting.

and Byways" for over twenty years. We also celebrated the graduation of **Jane Quatman, OP**, who just completed studies to become a nurse practitioner.

Monday morning we heard some updates from our Justice Promoter, **Diane McOsker, OP**; and from three EMDs who shared how their ministries promote peace, justice and care of creation: **Maria Teresa Apalategui** on immigration issues in Arizona, **Monica Myers** on alternative healing, and **Kathy Broussard** on her work in criminal cases to mitigate the death penalty. Sisters and Associates watched the power point on the activities of the Dominican Alliance before lunch. We did all of the above in just three days, a time permeated with the Paschal Mystery.



Top Left: Sr. Suzanne Brauer records a response from her table.



Middle Left: Srs. Diane McOsker, Rosemary Hoppe and Alberta Schindler discuss the Cluster options.



Left: The Sisters carefully consider all facets of the options.

Great Bend

June 24, 2005



Srs. Myra Arney and Martina Stegman pause in discernment before their group discusses the options.

On the evening of June 23rd, 2005, the Great Bend congregation gathered for prayer in preparation for our day on the Cluster conversation. After singing the mantra, “Sacred is the call, awesome indeed the entrustment, tending the holy, tending the holy” (by Suzanne Toolan RSM), we used Eric Law’s mutual invitation process to contemplate and share on the Gospel reading for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time. During the sharing time, two questions were asked: “What might Christ be telling me in this reading to prepare my heart for the Cluster conversation?” and: “What does God ask me to do, be, or change through this passage?” We closed our prayer by completing the statements: “I thank God today ...” and: “I ask God today ...”

During the day, June 24th, the gathered community viewed the Cluster PowerPoint – where we’ve been from the very beginning, reviewing the history of the Cluster, the Cluster committees, the Cluster cycles, the Cluster gatherings, and the discernment process of the Cluster, including the Cluster Statement of Dominican Life and Mission.

Throughout the day, as the community discussed remaining in the Cluster conversation and considered the models of reconfiguration, implications (both positive and negative) of these commitments for the Great Bend Congregation and for all the Cluster congregations were shared in groups and at the microphone. Groups were asked what could be affirmed in each reconfiguration option and what changes they would like to see made.

Opportunity was given also for dreaming of other reconfigurations. Some examples were: a feminine model of provinces using the international model of the Dominican men, and a national community such as Dominican Sisters U S A (with three regions, East, West, and Central), etc.

By the end of the day, community members were ready to indicate their personal commitments to continuing in the Cluster conversation. Working with the continuum of 1 to 10 that all congregations used, 72 of the 79 members present affirmed remaining in the Cluster conversation by a personal affirmation of 5 or above. Members not present were contacted for their level of commitment. The day’s discernment not only recommitted the congregation to the Cluster process, but also in many ways, through talking and sharing with one another, brought members up-to-date on the Cluster process, calmed fears, and raised the level of trust in a thus far open-ended journey we all share. “Everything before us brought us to this moment, standing on the threshold of a brand new day.”

Top Right: Sr. Ann Metzen reports her group's discussion for the whole assembly.

Middle Right: The Great Bend community gathered for their Cycle Four meeting.

Right: Sr. Lorena Bolte, Assistant Prioress and member of the CCC, leads part of the congregational Cluster day.



Kentucky

During the four-day congregational meeting, June 23-26, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine, Kentucky, came together at St. Catharine Motherhouse to make a decision on whether or not to stay in the Cluster conversation. The four days were very intense with conversation, listening, sharing, contemplative time, and laughter.

The weekend kicked off with registration on Thursday afternoon, followed by an opening ritual and reception that evening. During the kickoff, sisters became reacquainted with one another, as well the facilitator, Mary Mollison, CSA. There was also plenty of time to socialize and catch up with one another.

Friday was a big day, filled with presentations and reflections on the possible options. An overview of the Cluster process to

date was shown to ensure every Sister was up to speed on the decisions that had brought them this far. *Sr. Marie Jeanne Surette* presented the TRENDS for our congregation and gave the Sisters an overview of the current number of members in ministry, as well as an insightful look into the future.

After the specific congregational numbers were reviewed, an activity highlighting where we've been, where we are, and where we will be encouraged the Sisters to take a deeper look into the realistic numbers of the congregation. All the various ministries were posted around the room and the Sisters moved toward the ministry to show the past, present, and future.

During the afternoon, Sisters were given time for personal reflection before discussing the three options. During table discussions, small groups allowed for a complementary mix of intimate conversation while also listening to other perspectives.

Saturday was another big day, in which a decision was to be made regarding the congregation's future with the Cluster. The morning was dedicated to discussing the implications of remaining in the Cluster conversation

June 23-26, 2005



The Sisters broke into roundtable groups to discuss the Cluster options

or not. Later in the day, the majority vote determined that the Kentucky congregation would remain in the Cluster conversation.

A liturgy was held Saturday night, followed by free time for the Sisters to reflect or simply relax after such an important decision was made. On Sunday, the weekend came to an end with prayer and a closing ritual.



Top Left: Sr. Cathy Galaskiewicz brings her ideas to the table.



Middle Left: The Sisters participate in a group activity outlining the ministries of the past, present and future.



Left: Srs. Deirdre Cotter and Claire McGowen discuss the Cluster options in great detail.

Oxford



Sr. Ruth Hamel records small group responses.

The major portion of our Annual Assembly was devoted to updating our Sisters on Cluster activities. Friday afternoon was set aside for subcommittee and task force reports and our role in those groups. Significant time was spent sharing the results of the Survey of Lived Experience, highlighting the feedback from several questions for the Sisters.

Saturday was devoted to ongoing discernment for the Cluster process. Sisters shared their experiences of prayer, discussion, attending the Gatherings and attending the Assembly. Feedback was sincere, authentic, and positive. Sisters who had the opportunity to attend a Gathering and the Assembly expressed that they enjoyed meeting Sisters from other Cluster congregations and sharing concerns and dreams. Portions of

Top Right: Sr. Connie Schoen preaches on the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

Middle Right: Sr. Janet Roesener (standing) facilitates a panel discussion.

Right: Cycle Four responses are recorded.

the videos from those events were viewed. A small group of Sisters viewed the videos in their entirety at the close of the session.

In facilitated discussion, 27 Sisters shared their thoughts and feelings on each of the revised options. Although there are additional comments, points are cited in three's for the options. In the Inter-Congregational Connection, the Sisters affirmed: (1) collaboration, (2) congregations maintaining their own identity, and (3) choosing the level of participation. Implications included (1) duplication of Alliance activities, (2) the status quo would be maintained, and (3) the costs associated with additional meetings. This option was not supported because Sisters thought it duplicated the Dominican Alliance.

In the Canonical Federation option, Sisters affirmed (1) the values, (2) collaboration, and (3) the freedom to transfer. Implications for Oxford include (1) greater financial strain, (2) increased involvement for representatives at meetings, and (3) the additional layer of leadership. This option was not supported.

July 22-24, 2005

In the Canonical Union, Sisters affirmed (1) all congregations entering as "equals," (2) the concreteness of this step as it would be the end result of the Canonical Federation, and (3) the government structure with regions. Implications of this option for Oxford included (1) loss of congregational identity, (2) relating to new leadership and (3) accepting the challenges of immersing ourselves in our Dominican identity. We felt that these implications would be the similar for other Cluster congregations. This option was supported.

Appreciation was expressed for those who developed the Cluster discernment process and for the work of the Cluster Coordinating and Executive Committees.



Akron

"It's a journey in faith and the story continues."

Such was the theme of the Congregational Meeting held August 6 & 7 as 65 Akron Dominicans gathered to discuss and share their personal journeys in the Cluster process. Blauvelt Dominican Sr. Catherine Howard facilitated the meeting regarding where the congregation as a whole stands in relation to the Cluster process, and the consideration of remaining in the process in light of the three revised options for reconfiguration.

During the discussion of the options, our Sisters quickly rejected the options for a Canonical Federation and for Inter-Congregational Connection. The option for a Canonical Union was the only viable reconfiguration for us. In light of this decision, the gathered assembly raised the issue

of alternatives should Canonical Union not be a strong choice at the November Inter-Congregational Convocation in St. Louis. After much discussion, several alternatives were suggested as future possibilities.

The meeting concluded in a similar fashion to the other congregations' meetings, with a show of red, yellow, and green cards to take "a leaning" of our commitment to the following statement: "We will continue to remain in the Cluster Journey shaping our future together with other Cluster congregations" with the added stipulation "depending on the outcome of the November Inter-Congregational meeting." The results of the leaning were 64 green cards were raised and one Sister abstained. No yellow or red cards were held up.

The following day, *Srs. Mary Ann Wiesemann* and *Diana Culbertson* presented a summary to and took votes from our four Sisters at Regina Health Center. Also, Sr. Mary Ann personally spoke with three Sisters who were unable to attend. All voted with green cards and chose "10" as a personal response. Sisters were invited to attend the Inter-

August 6-7, 2005



Sr. Mary Noel summarizes on paper ideas of those at her table.

Congregational Convocation in St. Louis in November.

The Akron congregation will meet in St. Louis following the November Convocation to discuss the results and determine our next steps. Those Sisters unable to be present in St. Louis are asked to attend a meeting at the Motherhouse on December 30, 2005.



Top Left: Srs. Juanita Henley and Maria Beesing share in the Opening Prayer Ritual.



Middle Left: Sr. Dorothy Mattingly discusses the options with Sr. Suzanne Repasky.



Left: Srs. Loyola Ernst and Elaine Eggert listen to Sr. Bernadine Baltrinic share her thoughts.

Columbus



Srs. Edwina Devlin and Lelia Horkans discuss the possibilities.

The Columbus Dominicans engaged a large percentage of their congregation in the Cycle Four meeting, which was held in two sessions – one in early July and a second in late September.

Prioress **Anne Kilbride** opened the meeting with a reflection based on the special virtues needed for religious life today, as developed at the 2004 Congress of Religious. The preaching charism played a central role in the weekend as members inspired their companions on the journey with their own reflections on the Word. Preachers included **Srs. Matthias Sterner; Martha Starrett; and Arleen Kisiel.**

Since a number of Sisters had asked that any decision be determined by a written response, this request was honored by a process with the same level of choices other congregations had addressed

Top Right: Our September facilitator was Sr. Barbara Dannhausen (Sinsinawa).

Middle Right: Srs. Anne Murray and Francis Gabriel Mahoney share their ideas.

Right: Srs. Nadine Buchanan and Nancy Ames take a break during the meeting.

with the colored cards. Sisters unable to attend the meeting had been offered the same personal response sheets and possibilities in advance, and these were available for the final count. After a time of prayerful contemplation on the final day, 229 members made these choices: support for continuing the Cluster Journey: 113 (49%); support for continuing with caution: 71 (31%); no support for continuing with the cluster process: 45 (20%). With 184, or 80% offering support, it was clear that the Columbus Dominicans will continue with the other six congregations in the Cluster Journey.

The second part of the leaning asked for levels of support on a scale of 1-10. These were tallied to reveal that more than 50% (123) chose the range of 8-10; another 44 selected the range of 5-7; 17 indicated levels ranging from 1-4, and 42 indicated no support (0).

Throughout the process there were memorable moments that demonstrated the reality of the present and the hope for the future. One occurred when one of the newest members called for her colleagues in ministry to stand as she read the names of those who had been professed from 2004,

July 1-2 and September 23-25, 2005

year by year, back over the past 15 years. These newer members were recognized and applauded.

Another was when the facilitator asked those attending to move to various parts of the rooms according to their present status: active ministry, leadership, congregational service, retired, or skilled care. After each had chosen a location, she then asked them to move (or remain) as she projected forward through 2008, 2014, and 2020.

Sr. Anne Kilbride offered reflections in closing, calling first for special prayer, in silence, for those for whom the decision was not what they had wished; and then for those for whom it was. She then returned to the virtues named in her opening reflection, noting that all could be held sacred in the familiar words of Micah: Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with your Lord. And, she added, with each other.



Where do we go from here?

Cycle 1
Fall 2003/Winter 2004
Congregational
Meetings

Cycle 2
September 2004
Inter-Congregational
Gatherings

Cycle 3
Feb 18-20 2005
Inter-Cong. Assembly
St. Louis

Cycle 4
Summer 2005
Congregational
Meetings

Cycle 5
November 4-6, 2005
Inter-Cong. Convocation
St. Louis

The responses from the fourth cycle have been refined into two options that will be evaluated during the Inter-Congregational

Convocation of the fifth cycle.

Purposes:

- To celebrate process thus far
- To receive the challenge by keynote speaker, Don Goergen, OP
- To present and clarify the proposed options as presented by the Reconfiguration Subcommittee
- To evaluate each option in the light of Dominican Mission and Values
- To consider the implications of the proposed options
- To indicate, at this time, the strength of support and preferences for options

After the fifth cycle, in December 2005, the CCC will meet to study responses from the seven congregations and to give a preliminary summary to Leadership Teams, to be shared with membership.

Cycle 6

January - May 2006
Meetings for further
personal/group
discernment

During Cycle 6, congregations will provide opportunities to discuss the options using learnings from the Convocation. Each Sister will

have time for personal discernment and will be given the opportunity to express her support for the option she prefers.

Cycle 7

Jun 2006 - Apr 2007
Leadership Decision
Cong. Meetings
Chapters

The CCC will compile input and present its recommendations to the Leadership Teams of all the congregations, including an indication

of membership support on the selected option. Leadership will make the choice of which option to present to the congregations for their decisions at congregational meetings/assemblies or Chapters.

During this cycle, congregations will meet to prepare for their decision on the selected option for reconfiguration. Chapters or congregational meetings/assemblies will be held in April 2007 to vote on the structure for reconfiguration.

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