



Cluster: a Dominican journey in faith

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Reflections on Don Goergen's Convocation Address: 'The World's Deep Hunger: A Person's Deep Gladness'

By Sr. Catherine Colby, Columbus



This November as 310 Dominican women from the seven Cluster Congregations gathered in St. Louis, they were enlivened with words of inspiration, challenge, encouragement, and hope through the creative contemplative preaching of Donald Goergen, OP.

To recapture on paper the experience of Don's proclamation of the "Good News" of our Dominican Cluster Journey is not easy. Below is an attempt to articulate highlights of the address that stirred many to say they were changed, inspired, and moved to a space in the Cluster process that was energizing and touched by the presence of the Spirit. We were truly immersed in "holy ground."

Within the context of our morning prayer, Don invited the gathered community to listen and reflect on five themes. Each theme guided us to contemplate our response to the call to be prophetic Dominican women responding with gladness to the needs of our world's deep hunger. The first theme, entitled

"The Joy of Dying," challenged us to reflect on the process of our own dying. We were invited to consider seeing death as an opportunity and invitation to "leap into the lap of our loving and merciful God." We were encouraged to view dying as a joy rather than an evil as our society views it.

Don shared words from Robert Browning's poem *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the
first was made:*

*Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God:
see all, nor be afraid!"*

Don urged that we view ourselves as being in a moment of "gathering wisdom" over time, with a focus of passing on wisdom to others for the sake of the mission. He noted

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Top: Srs. Diane Traffas (Great Bend) and Valerie Shaul (Columbus)

Bottom: Fr. Don Goergen, OP, delivered a stirring keynote address Saturday morning.



Right: Srs. Barbara Jean Pelak (Oxford), Rocío Torres León (Columbus), Sue McMahon (Oxford), and Robin Richard (NOSM)

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that the goal of an elder person of wisdom or sage is not aging but passing on wisdom. Don reminded us that how we view our personal dying process parallels how we view the living and dying process within community. As preachers of the Good News we must be convinced of these words found in the Scriptures, (1 Cor 2:9) "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what God has ready for those who love Him." He then posed these questions:

Can we accept ourselves as a sage rather than one who is aging?

Does our contemplative heart allow us to believe that God cannot wait for us to die?

All paused for several moments of reflection before considering the second theme, "The Death of an Institution."

It was in this segment of the presentation that we were asked to consider how we view change and transition not only in our own life but the life of our congregation. We were encouraged to view the evolving times as a new beginning rather than an end.

This requires a letting go. If we had lived in the year 1000, would we

have even been able to imagine what 2000 would be?" As persons of hope, we need to converse about death and dying in a joyful, playful way. The histories of our creative, risk-taking, wisdom-filled ancestors model how to embrace the life and death cycle with Gospel joy. We need to focus on a *vision*, not a structure, that will resurrect us into "a new way of being," a contemplative prophetic stance.

As Dominican sages, we need to ask ourselves, what it is that we are going to hand on for the future? Do we wish to become like dinosaurs of our time or creative wisdom sages?

All paused for several moments of reflection before considering the third theme, "Towards a More Contemplative Form."

In this segment of the presentation, the assembly was asked to consider how we defined contemplation. Do we see ourselves as active contemplatives or persons who are active in the midst of contemplation? Do we fragment our lives viewing our contemplative side as a separate act apart from our activities?

In directing our consideration of these questions, Don presented us with three of Eckhart's images of a contemplative. The first image focused on considering the scriptural story of Martha and Mary. In Eckhart's view, Martha is considered to be more spiritually mature. She knew well about being stuck in the *contemplata* and not being able to move into *tradere*. She was grounded in contemplation that freed her to give the fruits of her contemplation in service. What Jesus is saying about Mary is that she needs to be sufficiently "grounded" before moving

Top: Srs. Marguerite Chandler (Columbus) & Shirley Bodisch (NOSM)

Bottom: Kentucky Sisters Juanita Carrigan and Betty Ann Hesse join the crowd in dancing the "Second Line," a traditional New Orleans dance, at the social on Saturday evening.



into service. Sometimes we can tend to become hyper-active Marthas forgetting that we need to be “grounded in the Word.”

The divine Triune Life also presents a contemplative model for us. In Eckhart’s second image shared, the Trinity is like boiling water. As it boils, it expands and flows over. Is our life a model of overflowing exuberance, love, and joy? Is our life a sign of letting God be God in us? The third image is that of the virgin-wife giving birth. One becomes pregnant to give birth. One must be contemplative in order to give birth. It is not what we do but who we are. It is not ministry but a way of life.

Don suggested that the evolution of fewer vocations may be God’s way of moving us into transition in order to birth a new way of life for the sake of the Gospel. As Dominican midwives, we need to ask ourselves, what it is that we are going to give birth to for the sake of the kingdom? Are we open to letting God be God in us? What is God asking of us next?

All paused for several moments of reflection before considering the fourth theme, “Contemplative Consciousness and the Evolution of Consciousness.”

In this section of the presentation, Don challenged us to consider viewing ourselves as contemplative midwives immersed in the evolution of consciousness in the 21st century. He challenged us with a clear and energizing proposal to open ourselves to a new level of consciousness that has the potential to spiral us to a deeper understanding of the interconnectivity that exists in all aspects of life in the human community.

Don presented a brief overview of Dr. Don Beck’s theory of Spiral Dynamics that might be referred to as the DNA of world views, what shapes our thinking.

We were then asked to consider approaching change in a manner that might move us to a second level of consciousness that is more holistic and open to the integration of all aspects related to the complexity of human nature and global diversity. This maturation in our level of consciousness spirals us upward and forward in the contemplative journey.

Beck describes his theory in these words: “It’s not that we need to form new organizations. It’s simply that we have to awaken to new ways of thinking. I believe it makes no sense to spend a lot of time attacking the current realities. It is time to create the new models that have in them the complexity that makes the older systems obsolete. And to the extent that we can do that, and do that quickly, I think we can provide what will be necessary for a major breakthrough for the future.”

Don noted that he believes religious life is being called to move into a second level of consciousness, as



Top: Srs. Roserita Weber (Great Bend), Cathy Galaskiewicz (Kentucky), Alicia Alvarado (Akron), Carmelite Zibilich (NOSM), Lisa Zucarelli (Columbus), Matthias Sterner (Columbus), and Michael Brigid Driscoll (Kentucky).

Bottom: In the closing ritual, members of Cluster congregations presented candles to the 31 Leadership Team members, entrusting them with the task of leading the congregations in the discernment process.

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Reflections on the Cluster Convocation

What in Don Goergen's talk touched you?



How often in your life do you experience a crowd quickly rising and giving a speaker a standing ovation? That was our experience after listening to Don's presentation. We were challenged and inspired through a guided exploration of five topics beginning with the "Joy of Dying," and culminating with a call to meet the world's deep hunger. Questions that challenged us included: What have we to rejoice? What have we to fear? Can we picture the Church in 3000 or even 5000? Don urged us to look at ourselves and to explore who we are, not what we do, and saw that we need to do this as true contemplatives. Our life of prayer must renew and transform us to be mid-wives, instruments for new life. This is where the world's needs and our gift of contemplation meet.

Thank you, Father Don, for calling us to the love that unites us in spite of our differences.

Sr. Augusta Barry, Columbus

Contemplation has always been an important part of my life, and to hear Don's remarks that "contemplation is a social ministry" affirmed this, especially as I grow older and have limited energy. His talk is also inspiring me to place more emphasis on who I am rather than what I do. Fear and trepidation were foremost in my mind as I arrived at the Cluster meeting. I was leaning toward union, but there were still a few doubts lingering in my thoughts. Even though a little fear still remains, there is no doubt now that the Spirit is calling us to birth a new entity through union, always remembering that, as Dominicans, we are called to be active contemplatives.

Sr. Catherine Bourgeois, NOSM



Don called and challenged us to a deeper level of radical active contemplation. I was moved by the images of dying, midwifing, birthing, and elderly saging. We heard a challenge to allow God's spirit to transform and imprint on our hearts, minds, and our entire being, the image of God. I appreciated Don's talk because it helped me to see the mission through the vision, not the other way around.

Sr. Ruth Hamel, Oxford





I was impressed with the ideas of “spiral dynamics” Don discussed and the danger of thinking that “where I am” is “where it is,” that Truth is solely in any one mode of being. It seems that too much comfort in any one stage can confuse us as to the nature of growth, which requires both shedding some of what has been helpful in the past and assuming the next challenging elements of our growth. Ongoing “deaths” and “resurrections” are required in our own individual growth and in the growth of our several institutions. “Death as a transitional necessity” is especially signified at this time of the year when everywhere we look, are the reminders of the cyclical nature of growth.

Sr. Mary Jakubiak, Akron

Everything Don said moved me. He provided a marvelous blueprint for where this Cluster should be leading, without defining the endpoint. We are coming together for the sake of the mission. And the mission is our Dominican life – a whole new way of being in the world, a life where contemplation flows over into action. And our action should be where our hearts’ delight and the hungers of the world intersect. We are not coming together to continue to do what we have always done, but rather to “midwife” religious life to a whole new level.

Sr. Eloise Hertel, Great Bend



Being attentive to Don’s talk enabled me to focus on our common mission as Dominicans, to tell our story and to carry the challenge of his insights forward in our hearts. It is not about what we do, it is who we are as active contemplatives that will enable new life to be born among us. If we believe that our Dominican life is truly our mission, there will be no transformation without a dying or a struggle to re-define our place in today’s Church and world. We are being invited into a radical participation in the Paschal Mystery, a way of being where something new will emerge for those who trust in God’s providence and the wisdom within each of us personally and collectively.

Sr. Ann Dominic Roach, Kentucky



The wonderful conversation on the centrality of contemplation for the future of religious life that followed Don’s talk convinced me that we are approaching the heart of the matter. It is for this transformation that we are even considering all of the work and sacrifices involved in becoming a new Dominican reality. As we spoke I felt myself so wanting to be part of the “midwife-ing” of this new consciousness for myself, for our Church, for our world. I know and feel the dying involved in this transformation, which is no disgrace, but in the Spirit is joy! I was taken to the place where the world’s deep longing and my own hunger meet in God’s own love flowing among all God’s people. How I desire that we continue this sharing. I left with new hope and gratitude.

Sr. Noel Toomey, NOEMD



Reflections...

How can reconfiguration enhance our Dominican Mission?



Reconfiguration calls us to examine more deeply the Dominican Mission, that communion of life in the Word that we live and preach. Efforts toward this “oneness” engages us at the heart of our Dominican Vocation.

Common discernment as Cluster congregations has already drawn us out of our comfortable thinking. We are able to envision together new strength and energy around the Mission. Ongoing discernment and a period of transitional government could be the seedbed for further creative responses in Mission, while preparing for the future oneness.

*Sr. Laetitia Anne Campbell,
Kentucky*



Clustering can help to enhance Mission in two ways. First, a larger group can give more powerful witness in support of the message. Second, a larger base can support individuals or small groups in innovative ministries to bring the preaching to the poor and marginalized.

*Sr. M. Dominic Savio Estorge,
NOSM*



As Dominican women, we must be practitioners of prayer, study, preaching, and community. As an elder, I realize my responsibility not only to live the Mission but to find loving, creative ways of stewarding the Mission for younger Dominican women. Being serious in living the Mission challenges us to look beyond the home base to the entire field of spiritual hunger and social ills. Many voices crying for our help will be left unheard if there is but one congregation left alone to respond to the needs of our global world. Intentionally joining with other congregations facing the same challenges and having the same desire to live the Mission is life-giving. This will allow us to have a stronger base of support as our contemplation moves into action. We must come together, recreate a structure of seven single voices combined in a harmonious cantata, singing the Good News, loud and clear in one voice for all to hear.

*Sr. Colleen Gallagher,
Columbus*

Unity in diversity, embracing our future, and blending human and material resources are values that could further our mission. *Unity in Diversity*: Our Mission of contemplative prayer opens us to the Oneness of God who obviously values the cultural, religious, and life-form diversity of our planet. *Embracing our Future*: Teilhard de Chardin said, "The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason to hope." This present moment finds us attempting to negotiate the most difficult and the most exciting transition we have ever faced; partnering could be a fresh beginning for a new and holistic consciousness. *Blending Human and Material Resources*: Collectively living boldly witnesses to a simpler and trustful way to be Gospel in today's world.

**Sr. Louise Hageman,
Great Bend**



I believe that reconfiguration can expand our vision and that it can better help us realize dreams and hopes in new, exciting, and mysterious ways. Through gentle and prayerful discernment, we can more fully realize that "we are called by God in the spirit and tradition of the Dominican Order to preach the liberating truth of the Gospel and to continue the mission of Jesus, preaching, teaching, and healing..." (from the Cluster Statement of Dominican Life and Mission).

**Sr. Yvonne Horning,
Akron**



Don Goergen asserted that Dominican mission and life are the same. If that is true, reconfiguration will enrich the lives of us all. By grounding ourselves in contemplation, our lives can be more focused on the works to which the Holy Spirit is calling us. We can zero in on our gifts without wearing so many hats. We will be able to share in the gifts of all members – academic, peace and justice, foreign missions, outreach, parish ministry, etc. Reconfiguration is for enrichment of the present and for the future of Dominican life.

**Sr. Joan Marie Jereb,
Oxford**



There are so many gifted women in the seven congregations. Each brings these gifts to the Dominican Mission. How can the Dominican Mission *not* be enhanced?

**Sr. Corina Padilla,
NOEMD**



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described by Beck, where newness might emerge. As midwives waiting for something new to emerge, we are challenged to be instruments of the Holy Spirit. Finally, he asked us to consider this question.

Are we able to structure ourselves in new ways to make us more contemplative venues for the Holy Spirit to emerge?

All paused for several moments of reflection before considering the fifth theme, "Contemplation and Justice."

Within the context of all that had been said, Don led us to a deeper awareness of contemplation as a social ministry. He noted that when we talk about Dominican Life in Mission, the mission is a way of being in the

world. Quoting Frederick Buechner, he read.

"There are different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done."

We were urged to ask ourselves, where do our gifts and the needs of the world meet?

Don enthusiastically noted that Dominican Contemplative Life is the source of deep gladness and the world's deep hunger. We need to keep this focus in view. In closing, he reminded us of the

prophetic words of the prophet Habakkuk (2:2) that read:

"God answered, write down the vision, so that the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goals and it will not fail though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay."

The highlights of Don Goergen's address shared on these pages could not possibly capture the enriching and grace-filled experience of this transforming event. A Dominican friar truly modeled the essence of what it means to be a Dominican contemplative intersecting with the needs of the world. Thank you, Don, your words were a blessing.

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