



Cluster: a Dominican journey in faith

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Oxford's Chapter

March 31, 2007

The Dominican Sisters of Oxford held their Chapter of Decision on March 31 in St. Dominic's Chapel at the Motherhouse.

Sr. Gene Poore, Prioress, welcomed the Sisters and their facilitator, Sr. Janet Roesener, CSJ.

Sr. Frances Mary Kernsovich took roll call of the Chapter delegates. The eleven delegates and two alternates were present.

During the prayer service, a candle was lit for each Cluster congregation after its name was intoned in the litany. After the litany, **Sr. Joan Marie Jereb** distributed ballots to delegates. Following a period of reflection, delegates were invited to place their completed ballots in the basket in front of the altar. Sr. Joan Marie counted them, and then each ballot was read and the results were given. Following the count, Sr. Gene announced that the Chapter had voted unanimously, 11 to 0, in favor of petitioning the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life for approval to form a new congregation with other Cluster congregations.



Sr. Mary Martin lights a candle in honor of the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic, one of seven candles lit in prayerful remembrance of all Cluster congregations at Oxford's Chapter.

Akron's Chapter

April 9, 2007

After many months, it was a happy occasion when the Akron Dominicans greeted one another as they gathered on Easter Monday outside their chapel before Liturgy. Dominican Associate **Fr. Jack McDonough** was celebrant and **Sr. Jean Dezort** was homilist. In her homily, Jean brought out the many times in Akron's almost 80-year history that the Sisters have endured changes and taken risks. Examples included leaving Caldwell, New Jersey, to form a separate congregation in March 1929 and the devastation caused by the Depression in October of that same year, when the young congregation's debt was overwhelming because of payment for the Elms property. Vatican II brought many changes which were helpful but resulted in the exodus of many Sisters.

Many Associates joined the Sisters for Liturgy that morning and remained in chapel to pray during Chapter. After Liturgy, all 66 Sisters were present, including the 18 delegates for the Extraordinary Chapter, except for the 10 Sisters receiving skilled care at Regina Health Center. Prioress **Sr. Mary Ann**

Wiesemann opened the Chapter by welcoming the Sisters, especially those who had traveled distances. **Sr. Marilyn Mihalic** lit one candle for each of the seven Cluster congregations during the very moving Ritual for Chapter Decision. Board of Election tellers **Sr. Maura Bartel** and **Sr. Marie Hohman** distributed ballots to the delegates. When the votes were tabulated, the results were a unanimous decision to join the other congregations in a new canonical union. It was an overwhelmingly joyful, tear-filled moment for most all the Sisters to hear these results. Sr. Mary Ann concluded this portion of the Chapter by informing the Sisters of the next steps to be taken in the Cluster. Each Sister received a copy of a discernment process to be used for her Statement of Intent.



Sr. Bernadine Baltrinic was one of 18 Chapter delegates for the Akron congregation.

Columbus' Chapter

On the morning of April 10, 150 Chapter delegates and 12 participants of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs gathered for the Opening Ritual of the congregation's Twenty-Second General Chapter.

The prayerful ritual was enhanced by the musical refrain, "We Walk the Path Together" (the Chapter theme), which was sung by all. This ritual created a sense of sacredness and communal commitment to this important moment in the congregation's history. Following the presentation of the Easter Candle, the Sacred Scriptures, the Constitutions, and Chapter logo, each delegate and participant was called by name and commissioned for

this sacred event.

The ritual was followed by an inspiring reflection by Sinsinawa Dominican Toni Harris, who spoke on



Columbus Srs. Noreen Malone and Ellen Dunn join in the prayer rituals of their Chapter.

Kentucky's Chapter

The Dominicans of St. Catharine, Kentucky, gathered for the second session of Chapter on the morning of April 11 with 128 voting delegates and approximately 12 non-voting delegates and observers.

A full agenda was planned. There was plenty of quiet contemplative study time before table sharing and large-group sharing around the topics of vision, governance, and finances. Polls of where the Sisters stood were taken after each of the sessions. These would lead up to the most important action of the Chapter: the decision whether or not to join the other congregations in petitioning CICALSAL to form a new congregation.

The evening of the first day there was a 185th anniversary celebration of the founding in 1822.

Friday afternoon's session was difficult as the group was divided into two semi-circles: those favoring remaining as St. Catharine on one side and those favoring the Union on the other. The arrangement forced the delegates to deal with and talk about "heart" issues instead of more information and "head talk."

Sr. Mary Vuong hands Sr. Columba Casey a treat from the Easter Bunny, who made a belated appearance at Kentucky's Chapter meeting.

April 10-13, 2007

the subject: "Who Are Dominican Women in the 21st Century?" The sharing among tables afterward proved the topic to be energizing and challenging.

Throughout the days that followed, the delegation engaged in Eucharistic celebrations, prayer rituals, conversations, and discussions to gather communal wisdom for a decision regarding the proposed Canonical Union.

On the morning of April 12, the Eucharist was followed by a spirit-filled sharing involving each delegate and participant who responded to the question, "What word, phrase, or sentence would you like to say to your Sisters now?" All present heard the voices of Sisters expressing words of encouragement, pain, challenge, trust, hope, and peace that have been a part of the congregational journey in faith together. That afternoon, the beautiful ritual of voting and contemplative prayer was held in the Motherhouse Chapel. The outcome of the voting was for joining the petition with the other congregations. As Dominican women, we continue on the journey in faith with hope and reliance on God's providence and words, "Fear not, I will be with you . . ."

April 11-15, 2007

The Taize prayer on Friday evening helped to prepare for Saturday morning's vote, planned and prepared by *Sr. Teresa Tuite*. Saturday morning, the Sisters gathered in the chapel for another powerful contemplative prayer experience that culminated in the voting process. In the end, the delegates elected to join the other congregations in petitioning Rome. It was a profound and historical moment, accompanied by many deep feelings – some happy, others sad, some hurt, but everyone relieved that the tension was over. After a few minutes of silent prayer, the traditional Salve, the Dominican hymn, was sung.

The remaining time of Chapter was spent finishing up and putting closure to this session.



Great Bend's Chapter

April 13-15, 2007

The Dominican Sisters of Great Bend held an Extraordinary Chapter of Renewal after Vatican II. On the evening of April 13, the congregation assembled for only the second Extraordinary Chapter of its entire history. The opening procedures of the Chapter included a prayer experience entitled "Preparing our Hearts," which was a reflection with three different scriptural translations of Galatians 5 on the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Saturday morning included time for Morning Prayer, a Word and Communion Service, and an extended period of contemplative time. After this prayer-filled period, the congregation prepared for the one issue on the ballot of this Chapter – the vote on the proposed Union of Cluster congregations. Preceding the official vote, the group of all but two of the congregation's members participated in a polling of the Cluster vote using green (yes), red (no), and yellow (undecided at this time) cards. With a polling outcome of all but six votes in favor of Union, the 45 delegates went into a voting session. In keeping with a congregational tradition of unanimity in major decisions, all Chapter delegates in the



Prior to the official Chapter vote, the Great Bend Sisters participated in a polling of all members to show the level of support for joining a Union with the other congregations.

end elected to vote in favor of the proposal. And so, with a unanimous vote, the congregation of Dominican Sisters of Great Bend decided to join with the other Cluster communities in petitioning CICLSAL to form a new congregation.

After the voting process, *Sr. Rene Weeks* gave a general overview of the next steps for the congregations who vote in favor of the Union. This session closed with a celebrative Liturgy on Sunday morning.

New Orleans EMD's Chapter

April 24-26, 2007



Eucharistic Missionary Srs. Diane McOsker, Esther Calderon, Evelyn Marchand, and Diane Hooley bless themselves during a Chapter prayer ritual.

The Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic experienced and celebrated the Paschal Mystery of Christ in a profound way April 24-26. Four EMDs missed the Chapter in St. Catharine, Kentucky, because of recent medical setbacks. Their absence, and that of three others, highlighted the post-Katrina frailty of this "little flock."

Our Provident God strengthened the group in many ways. Akron Dominican *Sr. Mary Catherine Hilker* touched all deeply by her personal witness and scholarly presentations: "Emmaus or Jerusalem? The Holy Preaching and the Eucharistic Mission" and "Women, Why Are You Weeping? Tears and the Holy Preaching." Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters Carol Artery and Priscilla Wood provided beautiful prayer environments and spirited

liturgical leadership. Dan Ward, OSB, offered canonical wisdom and brotherly support before and during the vote. Janet Roesener, CSJ, served as Chapter facilitator.

The hospitality of the St. Catharine Motherhouse Sisters and staff continues to ease the displacement from New Orleans for the 12 EMDs who now call Kentucky home and for the assembled delegation. The congregation's unanimous vote to join the petition with other congregations was made possible by the prayerful support of many within and beyond the Dominican Family.

Tears flowed freely after the vote Thursday morning and later that afternoon as the congregation celebrated the Golden Jubilees of *Srs. Mary Elizabeth Myers, Alberta Schindler, and Noël Toomey*. The Eucharist and festive supper for the Jubilarians celebrated among St. Catharine Sisters was a tangible experience of the congregation's Paschal reality: exiled/at home; bereft/abundantly blessed; bread broken and wine poured out/feast given to sustain our itinerant preaching.

New Orleans St. Mary's Chapter

April 28-29, 2007

On April 28-29, the Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Mary, held their Extraordinary Chapter of Affairs at Our Lady of Wisdom Health Care Center. Thirty-seven sisters were Chapter members while non-member Sisters attended some of the various sessions. Dominican Sister of Hope Sr. Catherine Walsh gave a presentation of her story entitled "From Paranoia to Metanoia." She recounted her own process of transformation that occurred when the Dominican Sisters of Newburgh (New York), Ossining (New York), and Fall River (Massachusetts) proceeded to form the Dominican Sisters of Hope.

Sr. Janet Roesener, CSJ, facilitated the congregation's deliberations and discussion questions with grace and respect. Her clarification of what needed to be considered gave the assembly direction, assisting in the Sisters' discussions and discernment. The beautiful grounds and patio of Our Lady of Wisdom provided quiet space for reflection and prayer. Not all the Sisters agreed with the proposal to become part of the Union with the other

Cluster congregations. Table talk, questions from the floor, and quiet reflection assisted the group in its preparation to vote. Being together as a congregation to make such an historical decision, after years of assemblies, inter-congregational gatherings, and communal and private prayer, most of the Sisters believed that the Holy Spirit was guiding the congregation to join with the other congregations in a Canonical Union. When the final vote was tallied, the results surpassed the two-thirds majority required to pass, and the congregation made the historical decision in favor of joining with the other congregations in petitioning CICALSAL to form a new congregation.



Srs. Mary deMontfort Schexnaydre, Lorraine Torres, and Mary Daniel discuss their views at the New Orleans St. Mary Chapter.

ST. MARY OF THE SPRINGS
THE DOMINICAN CLUSTER
2320 Airport Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43219



Visit the Cluster website at www.dominicancluster.org