



Reflections as the CCC completes its journey

By Karen L. Clay, Communicator



Top: Gene Poore (OX) and Lorena Bolte (GB)

Bottom: Waldia Warden (NOSM) and Joan Marie Jereb (OX)

More than three years ago, I attended my first meeting of the Cluster Coordinating Committee (CCC) as the Communicator for the Dominican Cluster. Even then I recognized how privileged I was, as a lay person, to witness this group of remarkable women working together.

Reflecting at the last CCC meeting in June 2006, I realized that I could now name the experience I had in observing the CCC – it was a hands-on, real-life lesson on what it means to be Dominican.

One of many things that struck me at the meetings was the profound sense of respect and reverence the members had for each other. The way they treated one another, listened to one another, and valued one another's opinions was in absolute contrast to what I experienced in the corporate world. Debates and discussions – even stark disagreements – were always thoughtfully spoken and considerate of other viewpoints. Words, actions, even body posture, suggested a recognition that each woman around the table held an important piece of truth.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the CCC that impressed me was that each woman carried her congregational members close to her heart throughout all the planning and deliberation. Keenly

aware of differences of opinion within their congregations, CCC members regularly raised issues they knew were important to their Sisters and routinely shared different perspectives from among their members. Of utmost concern was how to engage as many members as possible in the process, how best to communicate information to the Sisters, how to carry the experience of inter-congregational meetings back to those unable to attend, and how to honor all views without detracting from the process. Palpable was their pain at knowing that no matter where the Cluster process would lead, not all members' perspectives could be accommodated.

The CCC ended its journey as a committee with a blessing of one another and with heavy hearts – true testament to the love, sweat, and tears each invested in the committee process. From this communicator's perspective, the CCC members represented their communities well, while concurrently representing the best of what it means to be Dominican. Perhaps above all else was their utter confidence in God's guiding hand throughout the Cluster journey. Inspired by their trust in the Spirit, I echo their certainty that whatever the Cluster outcome, it will be God's will for all.



Standing: Ruby Cribbin (facilitator), Therese Leckert (NOSM; Exec Comm chair), Barbara Rapp (KY; Exec Comm), Diana Culbertson (AK), Lorena Bolte (GB), Rene Weeks (GB; Exec Comm), Gene Poore (OX), Joan Marie Jereb (OX), Jeanne Moore (NOEMD), Anne Keenan (COL), Anne Kilbride (COL; prioress rep).

Sitting: Waldia Warden (NOSM), Bernie Baltrinic (AK), Luisa Derouen (NOEMD), Bernadette Campbell (COL), Joan Monica McGuire (KY).

And the conversations continue...

Kentucky

First Session, Chapter of Affairs • June 22-27, 2006

Dominicans of St. Catharine, Kentucky, gathered from June 22-27 at the motherhouse to consider

“Birthing a New Way of Being.”

The hard work of these days focused on exploring options for our future together. We prayed, shared in small groups and at the open mic, and we dreamed of new models that would provide a foundation for a viable future. Essential content for the visioning



Kentucky Srs. Marie Jeanne Surette and Joyce Montgomery

Columbus

Congregational Assembly • July 23-26, 2006

St. Mary of the Springs gathered this past summer for a Congregational Assembly that was filled with mixed emotions and spirited discussion. The theme, “Toward a Future Filled with Hope,” accurately characterized the four main topics covered as integral to the Congregation’s future. One of these topics threaded throughout the Assembly was the question of the Cluster option.

Our keynote speaker, Miriam Ukeritis, CSJ, opened the Assembly with a presentation on “How to Face a Future Full of Hope and Realism.” Our facilitator, Renee Stevens, led the Assembly through a progression of steps for considering the Congregation’s future, beginning with self-reflection, then mutual sharing with one other Sister, and finally table discussions and large-group sharing.

We discussed how we saw the future of the Congregation, what we need in order to journey well together into the future, and how we can care for one another in life-giving ways. We explored our assumptions that undergird our opinions and reflected on what the Spirit is saying to us at this moment in our communal history.

included demographics, financial realities and reflections from all age-group representatives.

In the visioning process, the 135 Sisters considered ten internal and external realities: care for elders and infirmed; communications; planning and direction setting; decision making; property maintenance and staffing; ministry choices and legacy; leadership; finances; and new members, associates, and community life. These components comprised the foundation for the discussions of our future.

As Chapter began, delegates heard from a panel of Associates and reflected on a presentation from Mary Ellen O’Grady, OP, Executive Director of the Dominican Leadership Conference, and Joan Scanlon, OP, Executive Director of the Dominican Alliance. These presentations gave a context for the delegates’ deliberation.

Because some Sisters felt they needed more information about the Cluster before they could move on in discernment, a group of about 30 Sisters gathered to discuss and collect their questions. These were compiled, distributed to the Assembly, shared with the Chapter Planning Committee, and responded to by Leadership.

Our table discussions moved to the question, “What seems clearest about our preferred future as Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs?” Answers were also compiled, distributed to the Assembly, and ultimately placed with the Chapter Planning Committee for consideration. Along with the many differences of opinion expressed during the Assembly, it was encouraging to remind ourselves of our common commitment to Dominican values, to congregational revitalization, to mutual respect, and to one another.



Columbus Srs. Pat Thomas and JoAnn Hohenbrink

...Congregational Pre-Chapter Meetings

New Orleans EMDs

Summer General Assembly • June 26-30, 2006

Katrina and the Cluster provided both the context and content for the Eucharistic Missionaries' annual Summer Assembly June 26-30. The very setting of the Assembly underscored the influence of this dynamic duo. We met in Nazareth, KY, 20 miles from St. Catharine, where close to half of us live since flood waters made our former spaces uninhabitable.

It is doubtful we would have met in the Blue Grass State had not Kentucky president Joye Gros – at a Cluster meeting one year before Katrina – offered their motherhouse as an evacuation site. It is unlikely that Timothy Radcliffe would have been our special guest had two of our members not heard his presentation at the 175th celebration of our Columbus Dominican Sisters last summer. We love how he relates his topics to Jesus' actions at the Last Supper. We asked him to help our community connect our strong Eucharistic focus to his understanding of Dominican life and mission.

At the assembly, we considered our solid, positive leaning in May toward Union and decided that it did not make sense to elect new leadership in April 2007. Therefore, we are seeking approval from the Archbishop of New Orleans to forego this election and allow the present team to continue guiding the EMDs during this post-Katrina and pre-Cluster decision time.

This first General Assembly outside of Louisiana enabled most of our Sisters and six Associates to tour St. Catharine and meet our Kentucky Sisters. Our conversation with Timothy and our further reflections transpired in deep peace. While we don't know exactly what the future holds for us, we have a better image of how mutually enriching this possible Cluster Union could be.

*EMD Sr. Dot Trosclair, OP,
with Timothy Radcliffe, OP*



Great Bend Sr. Teresita Huse

Great Bend

Cluster Finances Discussion • August 5, 2006

About 82% of the active members of the Great Bend Community gathered August 5th to view the

video of the Cluster financial information. **Srs. Lorena Bolte** (Prioress) and **Rene Weeks** (Assistant Prioress) provided preliminary information and monitored pauses in the video to allow for questions and comments.

After the video, the members were reminded of the importance of confidentiality of the information.

In the buzz session time for responding to the reflec-

tion questions, the Sisters said they found the video to be "informative and encouraging," which "quieted some more fears surrounding possible Union," and expressed gratitude for the great work of stewardship shown by the treasurers of the Cluster congregations, past and present.

At the end of the presentation, all the financial information packets were collected to aid in keeping the information confidential and also so that they could be used with the video or DVD for Sisters who were unable to be present on August 5. Srs. Lorena and Rene urged the group to revisit the video if they wished, to use it as a regional study session, and/or to offer to show it to members of their local community who were unable to attend the large gathering.

Reflections

after initial Congregational Pre-Chapter and Chapter Meetings

Where are you now in the Cluster process?



Emotionally, it's been a roller coaster ride. I haven't yet seen the finished product. Am I going to fit in? Will it fit me? But, I know, for mission sake, we need to continue the process.

Sr. Kathy Broussard, New Orleans EMD

At this moment, I feel a deep call and challenge within to move in the direction of being more deeply connected to the other Dominican Congregations in the Cluster. I feel energized and excited as I remain committed to this venture into the unknown with all its possibilities for new life for us.

Sr. Nancy Ames, Columbus



At the beginning I had some doubts. Bigger is not always better. But Don Goergen's and Dan Ward's presentations in St. Louis were a turning point for me. Now I think the Cluster is the way to go. The Spirit is moving us religious to something new. What the finance materials presentation did for me was to convince me that there are Sisters who can take a huge volume of information and put it together so it is understandable, and that we will be able to do this in other aspects of our lives, too – so maybe bigger *can* be better ...

Sr. Geraldine Eakes, Great Bend



At the June session of our General Chapter we continued to consider an option other than Union. Until I see more fully and practically what that option will look like I would say that I will continue to discern and consider that along with Union.

Sr. Mary Louise Edwards, Kentucky





I am continuing to participate in the ongoing conversation. I still remain optimistic regarding the future possibility of merging with six other congregations. I believe that such a union is the best course to take if we sincerely want to further the mission of the Dominican Sisters in the United States. Joining together in Mission and Ministry (as well as in Prayer and Community) would be life-giving and fruitful. And it would be a sign of hope for younger members.

***Sr. Mary Brigid Gregory,
Kentucky***

I was never in any doubt about wanting to stay in the Cluster conversation. Maybe I didn't even know enough questions to be nervous. I think it is still the best option for the Cluster communities – for the future of our Dominican life, for the mission, and for a community that is supportive for younger members and for members yet to be in the US Dominican Family. The finance materials, which our community discussed on August 5, made clearer and helped to solidify my personal choice for the Cluster. We've had good stewardship of our material resources in all the Cluster communities and I want to never doubt that God will lead us financially, and in all other ways, into our future.

***Sr. Elaine Osborne,
Great Bend***

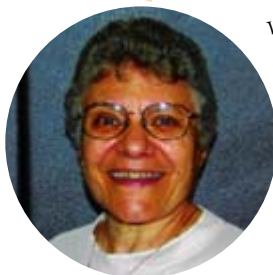


I don't know where I am actually in the process. Feelings-wise and intellectually, I flip-flop back and forth. I know the direction we are going in and when I think about it, I know it is imperative that we continue.

***Sr. Louella Petry,
New Orleans EMD***

As this meeting ends, the facts, figures, discussions and my own attempts at objective study leave me convinced that union is not a wise move for us at this time. My plea and my prayer is that we continue to work toward a future into which we can move together with peace in our hearts.

***Sr. Mary Elena Rizzo,
Columbus***



Cluster Connections

A Jump Start on the Cluster Family Inn



Akron Sr. Elaine Eggert (right) assists Great Bend Sr. Martina Stegman in her ministry.

The new *Cluster Family Inn* listing highlights opportunities for Cluster Sisters to visit one another. But even before this, **Sr. Elaine Eggert** (Akron) was living the concept with Great Bend Sisters in Kansas.

Sr. Elaine joined Great Bend **Srs. Martina Stegman** and **Gemma Doll** in residence at Liebenhaus of Contemplation in

Liebethal, Kansas, for the month of July. More than just a friendly visit, Sr. Elaine dove into sharing in ministry there.

She immediately joined a grief support group, helping Sr. Martina facilitate the gath-

ering of five widows who mourned the loss of long-time spouses. The Sisters told of losing a close sibling and a mother and provided a cohesive experience of release and learning to cope with loss.

Srs. Elaine and Martina met at an Alliance meeting where Sr. Elaine said one thing that most people don't know about her is that she once rode a roller coaster 35 times – in one day! – setting a park record. On that field trip she taught her students to ride the coaster by going with each one!

Following that meeting, the two Sisters kept in touch via letters and cards, and eventually arranged this visit, which helped draw them even closer as Cluster friends.

Helping in the Rebuilding and Healing

Getting a cafeteria ready for the opening of the new school year does not sound like an exciting venture. But it was a life-changing event for Resurrection of Our Lord Parish, a community devastated by Hurricane Katrina, and for the 15 Great Bend Sisters and other women in the summer volunteer ministry “Mission of Hope,” sponsored by the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend. The New Orleans St. Mary Dominican Sisters graciously hosted the group at Rosaryville in Ponchatoula during their volunteer week.

“I felt that our presence meant as much as the work we did in the parish,” said Great Bend **Sr. Teri Wall**, organizer of the Mission of Hope. “Block after block is still in ruins. Our presence to the people of the parish let them know that they were not forgotten.”

Fr. Michael Joseph Vinh Ngoc Nguyen, pastor of the parish, had promised that the cafeteria would be ready for both the school

lunches and the parish weekend Masses. It was important not just for their own parish, but for the surrounding parishes, four of which had schools that will not re-open. So scraping paint off windows and doors, washing walls, painting – which seemed so little in face of what remains to be done – was instrumental in having the cafeteria ready for the cabinets and baseboards to be installed.

In addition to elbow grease, the volunteers provided the school several boxes of books, thanks to the generosity of donors back home.

Volunteer Desire Fuentes summed up her experience by saying, “Even though we went to help them, I feel they helped us see the face of Christ.”



Mission of Hope volunteers from Great Bend scrape a window ledge at Resurrection of Our Lord Parish in New Orleans.

Constitution Committee Hits Ground Running

Members of the new Constitution Committee have already been hard at work to make numerous deadlines for their important tasks.

The main goal of the committee is to write a draft constitution for the possible new Cluster congregation. This was advised by canonists as an important step before the formation of the new congregation, so that congregational delegates will have something substantive on which to base their Chapter votes. Members of the new subcommittee include primary writer **Ruth Caspar** (Col), writers **Jeanne Moore** (NOEMD) and **Barbara Sullivan** (KY), and readers/responders **Rose Bowen** (NOSM), **Joanne Caniglia** (AK), **Frances Mary Kernasovich** (OX), and **Peggy Martin** (GB). Joanne serves as the committee's chair, and Dan Ward, OSB, is their canonical consultant. The committee meets regularly by conference call and had one in-person meeting in Columbus in July 2006. They are planning an easy electronic-survey method for gathering responses from individuals and look forward to member input.

For more information on the Constitution Committee's schedule, including dates for membership input on draft documents, please see the back page of this newsletter.



Srs. Barbara Sullivan (KY) and Ruth Caspar (Col)

As you discern this possible reconfiguration, you must ask yourselves if you are willing to share your unique charism with others. In your heart, how do you feel about the Cluster? Are you challenged or encouraged? What are the losses you will experience by becoming a part of the Dominican Cluster and what opportunities does it hold for your members? As 1 John:3 states, "We are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed."

*– Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP
presentation to the New Orleans EMDs
June 2006*

Please pray for all Cluster Sisters as we continue to discern the best path for the future of our congregations. In addition to informal discernment, the following are congregational pre-Chapter meetings presently scheduled for Cluster congregations.

Akron Pre-Chapter Meetings

Dates TBD

Columbus Regional Pre-Chapter Meetings I

Oct 7, 2006 Columbus, OH
Oct 21, 2006 New Haven, CT
Oct 28, 2006 Columbus, OH

Columbus Regional Pre-Chapter Meetings II

Mar 3, 2007 Columbus, OH
Mar 10, 2007 New York, NY
Mar 24, 2007 Columbus, OH

Great Bend Pre-Chapter Meeting

Dec 29-30, 2006 Great Bend, KS

Kentucky Regional Pre-Chapter Meetings I

Oct 7, 2006 Schuyler, NE
Oct 14, 2006 Boston, MA
Oct 14, 2006 St. Catharine, KY
Nov 4, 2006 Chicago, IL
Nov 11, 2006 Memphis, TN

Kentucky Regional Pre-Chapter Meetings II

Jan 20, 2007 Boston, MA
Feb 3, 2007 Chicago, IL; Memphis, TN
Feb 17, 2007 St. Catharine, KY; Nebraska

NOEMD Pre-Chapter Meeting

Nov 10-12, 2006 St. Catharine, KY
Feb 14/24, 2007 St. Catharine, KY (spec date TBD)

NOSM Fall Pre-Chapter Meeting

Sept 30, 2006 New Orleans, LA

NOSM Winter Pre-Chapter Meeting

Dec 2, 2006 New Orleans, LA

NOSM Spring Pre-chapter meeting

Feb 3, 2007 New Orleans, LA

Oxford Finance Discussion

Oct 21, 2006 Oxford, MI

Oxford Constitution Discussion

Jan 27, 2007 Oxford, MI

CCC Ends, ECCL Begins

The main objective of the Cluster Coordinating Committee (CCC) was to facilitate a discernment process for congregational members in order to arrive at a recommendation of a structure for reconfiguration. In June 2006, its task was accomplished when, based on years of membership input, the CCC made a recommendation that Union be the alternative structure for consideration at congregational Chapters. With the CCC ending, the Leadership Teams of the Cluster congregations appointed a new group to facilitate the last months of discernment.

Members of the new Executive Committee of the Cluster Leadership (ECCL) are *Srs. Anne Kilbride* (Col), *Therese Leckert* (NOSM), *Barbara Rapp* (KY), and *Rene Weeks* (GB). The latter three comprised the previous Executive Committee of the CCC. Along with Anne Kilbride, all have agreed to work on behalf of all the Cluster Leadership to continue carrying Cluster discernment forward. Let us remember in prayer the ECCL, all of our Leadership Team members, and all of our Sisters as we continue the Cluster Journey in faith.

“First we need to know we are all madly in love with the same God.”

– St. Thomas Aquinas

Cluster Calendar



2006

- Sept 7** Cluster Leadership meeting with civil and canon lawyers
- October** Reflection booklet to members
- Oct 7** Constitution draft to ECCL for input
- Nov 1** Revised constitution draft to members
- Dec 1** Membership input on constitution due

2007

- Jan 15** Newly revised constitution draft to full Cluster Leadership
- Jan 19** Meeting of Constitution Committee, leadership representatives, and canon lawyer
- Jan 31** Leadership feedback to Constitution Committee
- Feb 15** Newly revised constitution draft to members
- April-May** Congregational Chapters

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Visit the Cluster website at www.dominicancluster.org