



# Our Histories: How Each Congregation Came to the Cluster Process



The first meeting of the Cluster Leadership Teams, March 2001. Left to right, sitting: Srs. Arleen Kisiel (Col), Maura Bartel (Ak), Mary Faith Geelan (Col), and Bernie Baltrinic (Ak). Left to right, standing: Srs. Waldia Ann Warden (NOSM), the late Libby Schaefer (Ak), Sheila Marie McIntyre (Col), Dorothy Sarachene (Ak), Ellen Dunn (Col), Anne Kilbride (Col), M. Jordan Langenhennig (NOSM), and Angeline Magro (NOSM).

The Dominican Cluster has been a unique journey for each participating congregation. While Akron, Columbus and New Orleans St. Mary have been collaborating in the Cluster for five years, the other congregations – New Orleans Eucharistic Missionaries, Kentucky, Oxford, and Great Bend – joined the conversation more recently. We may be familiar with Cluster origins of our own congregations, but understanding the journey of other congregations is important as we move forward together in the Cluster process.

New Orleans St. Mary was the first congregation of the group to have formal conversations about collaboration, beginning with 1984 discussions surrounding the possibilities of inter-congregational dialogue. Congregation mem-

bers articulated that collaboration was key in strengthening their Dominican charism.

The Akron congregation began conversing about collaboration in 1992 at their General Assembly meeting. During a 1996 General Assembly, the congregation passed a mandate calling for inter-congregational dialogue within the Dominican family, and perhaps a discussion of a new entity. The council later met with three other congregations – Kenosha, Springfield, and New Orleans St. Mary – to explore possibilities, and sent letters to other U.S. congregations. This was the beginning of the Dominican Alliance, which met for the first time in December 1996. In later years, other congregations joined them in the Alliance.

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The Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic joined the Cluster in June 2003, attending their first CCC meeting in August. This August 2003 CCC meeting also included members from several congregations who were gathering information about the Cluster.

Pictured: Srs. Jeanne Moore (New Orleans EMD) and Lorena Bolte (Great Bend).



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In late 2003/early 2004, three new congregations joined the Cluster after congregational information and discernment meetings.

**Below:** Kentucky Srs. Mary Ann Budka and Marie Jeanne Surette review the Cluster possibilities.

**Below, center:** Oxford Srs. Mary Martin, Miriam Hazy, and Teresita Lipar discuss the pros and cons of joining the Cluster (with Srs. Helen Colette and Joan Marie in the foreground)

**Below, right:** Great Bend Srs. Rose Mary Stein and Charlotte Brungardt listen reflectively as their Sisters express their thoughts.

The Cluster began as a result of a conversation at a meeting of the Alliance congregational leadership teams in the summer of 2000. Members of each congregation evaluated their own congregational situations, and from this exercise, Akron and Columbus began to converse about a closer relationship. Soon after, New Orleans St. Mary joined the conversation. As a result of these initial discussions, leadership from these congregations began meeting regularly in March 2001, forming the beginnings of the Cluster.

In June 2002, the Cluster leadership teams determined that a committee was needed to move the process forward, giving birth to the Cluster Coordinating Committee (CCC). Other congregations were invited to consider being a part of the Cluster conversation, and by the spring of 2004, four other Alliance congregations joined.

The first new congregation to join was the

Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic. Several years earlier, the congregation had an LCWR viability study done, which raised several concerns regarding the future of the congregation, including shrinking membership. And so, at the congregation's Chapter in 2001, members voted "to live and live abundantly for the Eucharistic Mission," and to explore ways the congregation could continue in spite of decreasing numbers. Their attendance at an Alliance leadership meeting regarding the Cluster stirred waters that pointed to further consideration about joining the Cluster. Then, during their 2003 Summer Assembly, the congregation voted to join both the Dominican Alliance and Cluster, in hopes of creating a stronger foundation to enable their mission to continue.

In August 2003, representatives from other Alliance congregations met with the CCC in Columbus to gather information about the Cluster. They took this information back with them to their members and held congregational meetings





to discuss the possibilities of joining the Cluster. Congregations considering Cluster participation included Great Bend, Houston, Kentucky, Oxford and Springfield.

Shortly thereafter, Kentucky held four regional meetings to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Cluster involvement. After receiving feedback from the Sisters, the congregation joined the Cluster conversation in October of 2003.

During their annual meeting in August of 2003, Oxford decided to gather information about the Cluster. During September and October Sisters met in small groups to share information about the Cluster process. In November, the congregation held a study day to make a decision regarding entering the Cluster process. The Sisters spent this final discernment day listening and sharing. At the end of the meeting, they voted to join the Cluster process.

After receiving the invitation to join the Cluster, the Dominicans of Great Bend invited several sisters to meet with them to discuss the Cluster, ask questions, and clarify

some points. Several months later, in January 2004, the community met and discussed the possibilities. They ended with an 80% vote to join the Cluster.

Thus, the seven congregations joined in one conversation, and have continued to discuss the possibilities at congregational and inter-congregational meetings. Throughout the summer of 2005, the Cluster journey continues with each community having congregational meetings to reflect on the process thus far and to discuss options for reconfiguration. May we all continue to pray for one another – both individually and congregationally – as we continue on our journey of discernment.

**In the fall of 2003, the original four Cluster congregations held Cycle One discernment meetings.**

**Above, left:** Sr. Mariellen Phelps (Akron) shares her ideas at her congregation's meeting, while Srs. Carol Mayes (Houston) and Daniel Weakland (Akron) listen.

**Above, center:** New Orleans St. Mary and the Eucharistic Missionaries held a joint Cycle One meeting.

**Above, bottom:** Columbus Srs. Valerie Noone and Martha Kunesh attended their congregation's Cluster Cycle One regional meeting in New Haven, Connecticut.

# Meeting the Needs of the Day: New Ministries in an Ever-Changing World

True to the founding roots of the Dominican Order, the Cluster congregations all historically have adapted to meet the changing needs of the day. While once many Dominican Sisters were found teaching in classrooms, today they preach the Good News from new pulpits. Individually and congregationally, contemporary Dominican Sisters minister in innovative locales to which the Gospel calls them.

The Great Bend congregation sponsors the Ministry of Presence, a direct ministry with the economic poor, in Garden City, Kansas. Simple presence with the family is the beginning, letting the persons determine what needs they wish to address and allowing them to direct the assistance in as far as they are able. The sisters act as liaisons between those in need and the already existing resources: churches, health services, legal systems, immigration, and other agencies. This linkage gives the sisters a foundation for advocacy on behalf of the marginalized. *Sr. Roserita Weber* says, "My background in various ministries was a great preparation for this work among those with a

diversity of needs.

I enjoy the chal-

lenge of helping people achieve what they need at the moment."

When needed, the Sisters provide resources as they are able: driving instruction; free used furniture; a fund for medicine, utilities, gasoline, etc.; home visits for women without documents living in abusive situations; translation assistance; transportation; accompanying persons to court, immigration and other appointments. *Sr. Janice Thome* reflects, "In one of the most rewarding aspects of my ministry, I journey with women in the cycle of abuse. I must accept my powerlessness to change anyone and utter dependence on the God within both them and me. I have learned that simply being a listening adult who treats the women with respect builds self esteem and hope. Over time the growing inner self in the women begins healthy changes in the family dynamics."



**Sr. Roserita Weber (left) and Sr. Janice Thome (right) show a father and his children the thriving pepper plants in the Siena Village Community Garden in Garden City.**

Great Bend

# Kentucky

**Sr. Blaise Flynn**, of the Kentucky Dominicans, has ministered with Pine Street Inn since the early 1980's. Located in the heart of Boston, the organization serves hundreds of homeless people on a daily basis.

Sr. Blaise first worked in the women's section of the emergency shelter, but over the years moved around, ministering to pregnant, homeless women and to AIDS patients. In 1989, she helped found "Celeste House," a program for chronically homeless, drug addicted women and their children. The program served over 300 women and hundreds of children in its 16-year history. They were saddened that the program was discontinued in June due to a change in funding.

More recently, Sr. Blaise also has been ministering as a case manager for the permanent housing component of Pine Street, where 33 formerly homeless individuals live and share life.

For most, this is

their only family. Each day is different and she usually looks forward to going to work. While some may wonder if she gets depressed or discouraged in her ministry, she says she honestly does not.

"Sometimes there is pain, always there seems to be frustration with systems, but mostly there is life lived without pretense, and a care and concern that grows daily between us and among us," she says. "I can't think of anything I would rather be doing."

"Being a Kentucky Dominican has made this ministry even richer over the years," reflects Sr. Blaise. "So many of our sisters have made a difference in my ministry, and I am so grateful."



**Sr. Blaise Flynn**

# New Orleans St. Mary

**Sr. Paulette Paile**



For the past few years, **Sr. Paulette Paile**, of the New Orleans St. Mary congregation, enjoys her ministry doing secretarial work for the Magnificat Central Office. Begun in 1991, Magnificat's purpose is to help Catholic women become more open to the Holy Spirit through a deeper commitment of their lives to Jesus and to impart the Holy Spirit to one another by their love, service, and sharing the Good News. The organization has been recognized as an Association of the Christian Faithful.

Sr. Paulette loves her work assisting in prayer breakfasts,

Magnificat assemblies, and interacting with the leadership teams of the various Chapters, most of which are located in North America. There are several Chapters in other countries as well.

"This group is an outgrowth of the Charismatic Movement and that is what attracted me to it," said Sr. Paulette. "I love the feminine spirituality and the focus on hospitality and respect for all women that is the hallmark of Magnificat."

Sr. Paulette commented that the scriptural image of Elizabeth greeting Mary is an image representative of Magnificat, a way women can reach out to each other to bring all women to holiness.

EMD

**Sr. Noel Toomey** of the New Orleans Eucharistic Missionaries offers spiritual direction to a variety of God's people and teaches others to do the same. She has served as director of the Archdiocesan Spirituality Center in New Orleans since its inception in 1982.

The program began at the request of the major superiors of women religious that a center be established for ongoing spiritual direction. "Our Eucharistic Dominican charism heard that as a call to train spiritual directors," explains Sr. Noel. "It is part of our founding inspiration to train people to do what we do, which allows the ministry to go on beyond our presence. In spiritual direction, we see women and men from all walks of life and educational levels."

Of her work with the Notre Dame Seminarians, Sr. Noel says, "It is an opportunity to share this sacred ministry with those God calls and to

facilitate their helping others to respond to God's personal presence and love in everyday challenges."

Sr. Noel also serves as an instructor for a two-year program on spiritual direction consisting of 10-hour monthly meetings from August to May and an eight-day summer retreat. The groups usually meet at the EMD Hospitality House. The students are presently in ministry, and include priests, religious, and lay people, some of whom come from other dioceses.



**Sr. Noel Toomey (right) visits with a seminarian in her office.**

New Orleans

**Sr. Gregory George**



Akron **Sister Gregory George** began her work in chemical dependency in 1981 when she volunteered as a tutor at an Akron inpatient treatment facility. Soon after, she became Program Manager of the facility and began working with adult clients.

From this position, she was asked to move to Sandusky, Ohio, to establish adult and adolescent hospital-based inpatient units. During this time, she organized the programs and educated staff members, families, and the community about addiction, addictive behaviors, recovery, relapse, and the importance of family involvement.

After a few years, Sr. Gregory was asked to establish a residential home for women coming out of or going to prison. This facility is known as the Home of Hope. Sister worked with these women

by providing education and individual and group therapy.

With the Home of Hope firmly established, Sr. Gregory initially hoped to retire, but soon joined the staff of a local outpatient facility as a chemical dependency counselor. There she conducts diagnostic assessments, provides individual and group therapy, and works with the clients' referral sources. She has assembled a number of curriculum guides that are utilized in psycho-educational sessions with the clients. She also conducts a weekly group for female inmates at the county jail. Once a month she lectures at a court-ordered program for those individuals convicted with DUIs.

Over the years, she has organized and given numerous workshops on various addiction topics to teachers, parents, nurses, and families. Her favorite relaxation is watching "Law and Order!"

Akron

The Dominican Sisters of Oxford will open a House of Spirituality in the fall of 2005, on the grounds of the Lourdes Health Care Campus, Waterford, MI. The goal is to provide a place for quiet prayer and reflection so that all who come may experience the deep reality of God's love. The facility is easily accessible to people in southeastern Michigan and can accommodate individuals and small groups (overnight accommodations for four people). The house is located on beautiful Scott Lake in a serene atmosphere of flowers, trees and quiet walking paths. Spiritual direction and guided or directed retreats will be available.



The new House of Spirituality (above) is situated on beautiful Scott Lake (right), providing an ideal atmosphere for contemplation.

Oxford

Columbus

Last summer, Columbus **Sr. Catherine Colby** assumed a new role as the first Director of the Center for Dominican Studies at Ohio Dominican University. Funded in part by a legacy gift from the Columbus Dominicans, the Center is dedicated to supporting the university's Catholic intellectual life and promoting its Dominican heritage.

The CDS provides a variety of programs and activities throughout the year to promote understanding of the Dominican mission and to present a public voice on ecclesial, cultural, and societal issues. Some of the programming to date has included faculty and staff orientations, opportunities for faculty to present their work on topics related to the Center's mission, "Critical Issues Dinners" for students to discuss important topics, and other related lectures and workshops.

Guest speakers have included

noted theologians Thomas O'Meara, OP, speaking on the future of the Church, and Donald Goergen, OP, speaking on the challenges for colleges and universities in the new millennium. In less than a year, Sr. Catherine has put together an impressive array of offerings. And, her plans for the next academic year are even more ambitious!



**Sr. Catherine Colby, OP**

# Subcommittee Update

The Communications Subcommittee meets regularly via conference call, but also keeps very busy between meetings!

This subcommittee's main tasks over the past two years have been creating and distributing quarterly Cluster newsletters and developing content for the Cluster website. In addition, subcommittee members copy and distribute regular Cluster mailings to members and maintain a common database of addresses. They also can be seen buzzing about Cluster meetings taking photos and coordinating audio-visual equipment. The subcommittee also takes on the occasional special project, such as the Cluster PowerPoint presentation created by subcommittee member *Sr. Catherine Colby (Columbus)* for this summer's congregational meetings or the Congregational Thumbnail Sketches members are working with the Resources Subcommittee to create for the fall.



The Communications Subcommittee takes a break together during the Cluster Inter-Congregational Assembly in February, 2005. Members are, from left to right: *Sr. Catherine Colby (Columbus)*, *Sr. Anne Keenan (Columbus, CCC liaison)*, *Susan Satter (NOEMD)*, *Karen Clay (Columbus)*, *Sr. Shirley Bodisch (NOSM)*, *Sr. Theresa Damicone (Akron)*, *Sr. Elaine Osborne (Great Bend)*, and *Sr. Gene Poore (Oxford)*. Not pictured: *Sarah Ray (Kentucky)*


## Cluster Calendar

2005

While some congregations have already held their summer Cycle Four meetings, please pray for all Cluster Sisters as we continue on the journey of discernment. *Our next inter-congregational gathering will be the Cluster Convocation, November 4-6, 2005, in St. Louis.*

<u>Cycle Four Congregational Meetings:</u>			
May 28-29, 2005	New Orleans St. Mary	June 23-26, 2005	Kentucky
June 3-6, 2005	New Orleans EMD	July 22-24, 2005	Oxford
June 24, 2005	Great Bend	August 6-7, 2005	Akron
		Sept 23-25, 2005	Columbus

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