



Cluster: a Dominican journey in faith

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Moving from “Intercongregational” to “Congregational”

For many, it was a powerful moment to realize that the summer’s Intercongregational Gatherings would be the last time our seven congregations would come together indeed “inter-congregationally” – as seven separate congregations. It was cause for a mixture of emotions as we confronted the reality of our moving forward toward unity in such a poignant, tangible way. As we prepare for our first official gathering for the new congregation, the Pre-Chapter Assembly this month, may the hope that has led us to this moment nourish our contemplation and conversations, inspire our preparations and deliberations, and encourage us to make bold and sound decisions for the sake of Dominican Life and Mission.

Gatherings Inspire, Challenge, Transform



Srs. Celeste Albers and Judene Lillie participate in the opening ritual.

Peaceful and enthusiastic participation in forming our new congregation well describes our Intercongregational Gatherings in New Orleans, June 20-22, and Columbus, July 18-20, 2008. We were somewhat unsure and uneasy when we discerned together in St. Louis (November 2005 and February 2006) whether or not we wanted to undertake a monumental

change in how we structure ourselves, for the sake of Dominican life and mission. Our personal and communal “yeses” since then are transforming us already.

Both Gatherings, in hotels large enough to host about 200 Sisters, followed a common schedule. We discussed how we want to come together as a congregation of preachers. We took several polls about our new name. Members of some committees gave input and sought feedback on key, interrelated issues: a government structure (mission circles); a process for electing congregational leaders during our Easter Week Chapter; and provisional directives on membership and governance.

We engaged in thoughtful, spirited conversations at tables and through open microphone sessions. We spontaneously sought out little known Sisters for meal

time sharing. Excitement bubbled as we milled around booths displaying the work of our very active committees.

We participated in powerful, prayerful rituals and a Eucharistic Liturgy. Our wonderful preachers were *Srs. Maxine Shonk* and *Cathy Hilbert* in New Orleans and *Srs. Jan Schlicting* and *Mary Louise Edwards* in Columbus.

We laughed a lot. The Dominican High School Jazz Band had us clapping hands, dancing, and second-lining through the large hall on Saturday night in New Orleans. The folksy intonations of Josie and the Light accompanied our laughter and conversation during the evening social in Columbus.

Two sensory memories capture the spirit and meaning of the weekends: the illuminated red orbs on our tables and *Sr. Amy McFrederick’s* beautiful sung refrain “I will take the fire in my soul, let it build the blaze that You foretold. I will take the fire You have cast on the earth, Lord, to ignite and light my world!”

Optional tours of ministries in Columbus and post-Katrina New Orleans, as well as a mission experience in New Orleans, enabled us to see and begin claiming our congregational founding houses and ministry sites.



Sr. Alberta Schindler enjoys “second lining” in New Orleans.

Reflections

What in the Intercongregational Gathering was a highlight for you?

Sr. Maria Teresa Apalategui, NOEMD
(attended New Orleans)



Friday night during the naming process I felt an inner energy that led me to the word "peace." (I had not considered this name for our new congregation before.) As the weekend progressed I felt the energy in those with whom I spoke and in the group as it expressed itself with joy, frustration, challenge, struggle, grief, celebration. It all seemed to come together on Sunday in the group's willingness to move forward.

It is difficult to say that there was one highlight, however I will say that the welcoming and joyous spirit I experienced when first stepping into the Hilton Hotel was inspiring. The greetings among congregational members and between congregations were heartwarming. But the place I felt most excited about our being together was in the hallway outside the ballroom where the booths were located. There I felt energized by all the work that has already been done by the various committees and by the manner that had been chosen to communicate the work. Each booth reflected something unique about "us" and displayed this uniqueness in informative, creative, and artistic ways. I felt encouraged to own our new relationship, to go forward with a sense of purpose and to enjoy all that the future holds for us as "one."

Sr. Angelica Armstrong, Columbus
(attended New Orleans)



I loved the booths, how they were arranged and how everyone participated in visiting them. I also enjoyed meeting so many people, many of whom I knew and many whom I met for the first time. It really felt like "old homecoming week." These gatherings were a wonderful way for us to mingle and appreciate the Sisters from our sister-congregations.

Sr. Rose Bowen, NOSM
(attended New Orleans)



Once in a while, one comes to the realization that God speaks to us in a most powerful and bold way – my impression of the Intercongregational Gathering in New Orleans was such a moment for me. Being women faithful to the Gospel, the “fire of trust” was blazing anew for us in attendance. There was a refreshing spirit in getting to know one another. The booths added to the excitement with all that was offered, and the well planned process for the weekend provided the sense of God’s presence, love, and goodness. The warm welcome, beautifully prepared prayers and liturgy, symbolic candle art, open table discussions, honest sharing, capable facilitators, festive meals, and New Orleans’ entertainment called us forth to faith and trust in our new venture. The closing of the weekend brought me to a deep thankfulness to our loving God in speaking to us in so many ways during this most sacred moment of time.



*Sr. Marie Damicone, Akron
(attended New Orleans)*

The liturgy and prayers were wonderful. The sense of family and togetherness was really felt for the first time at the gathering. The closing prayer ritual on Sunday was symbolic as each congregation extinguished its candle and the new candle was lit.



*Sr. Helen Colette Melkon, Oxford
(attended New Orleans)*

When asked this question my first thought was that it is a little bit like coming home and seeing some people I’ve come to know that I hadn’t seen for some time. This experience was so different from the many other times when I felt like I was a person among strangers. I also felt like so many, many of the Sisters from other Congregations were as eager to see me as I was to see them. Our Great Bend community has always been a celebrative community and I felt so close to others when we paraded and danced around the evening with the music offered by the Dominican High School Jazz Band.



*Sr. Rose Mary Stein, Great Bend
(attended New Orleans)*

I think it was coming together, six at a table, and sharing. The flames, created from balloons, were a nice touch, and the closing ritual was very moving.



*Sr. Thomas Joseph Nacy, Kentucky
(attended New Orleans)*

What in the Intercongregational Gathering was a highlight for you?

(continued)



*Sr. Virginia Berak, Oxford
(attended Columbus)*

The overall planning and presentations were superb. The blowing out of the candles that represented each individual congregation during the closing prayer was something that touched each of us. I felt a sense of oneness, peace, and joy. Everyone was excited as we accepted one another as family.

The Friday night opening session of the Gathering was a highlight for me, where 200+ Dominican women gathered in silence. I was overwhelmed with the sense of the presence of the Spirit moving among us. I knew then all would be well. The spirit of enthusiasm was contagious. Who would not want to be part of this movement! New friendships abounded at the tables, in sharing meals, and at the evening socials. Perusing the pictorial directory, one could locate Sisters from the other congregations with the same first name, birth date, or year of profession, affording new possibilities for tapping into friendships. Dramatically, the trunk is closed. The future is wide open.



*Sr. Jean Dezort, Akron
(attended Columbus)*

I enjoyed the process and meeting new people. I liked the booths and the creativity of those who put them together. The passports and getting them stamped was a great idea.



*Sr. Catherine Bourgeois, NOSM
(attended Columbus)*

The one word I resonate with is “appreciation,” to increase in value. All the aspects of the Gathering were in the service of transformation, a passage from one form into another. In a very clear way I realized the peace, love, and joy that is always with us. There was a felt sense of exhilaration as Sisters bustled about greeting old and new friends. All the collaborative work done by the committees demonstrated how working together is increasing, appreciating. The booths displayed the creativity of each committee – from Finance to Vocations – and were so educational! A favorite experience was the Dominican Life and Mission Committee’s process that integrated prayer with inspirational film clips and table discussion around the theme of “loving what we do” – appreciating the Light within. The closing ritual was powerful with the feeling of finality about it. The Gathering was a time for all of us to appreciate and grow in value!



*Jeannine Halloran, Columbus
(attended Columbus)*

Amid my tears that accompanied each darkened candle into the trunk, I suddenly recalled an old metaphor about dying: “... extinguish the lamp; dawn has come.” And I felt a surge of joy: nothing of our pasts was lost, but truly kept in God’s heart – “kept, with fonder a care” – alive, to support our common future!



*Sr. Fara Impastato, NOEMD
(attended Columbus)*

The closing ritual was powerful in so many ways. It was a very emotional experience. There was such a touching finality to it – we were no longer Great Bend Dominicans – and it wasn’t just me. When you are in the midst of powerful feeling it is so hard to put into words, but every member of each of the communities was experiencing the same transition, loss, and pain – and yet we all knew the feeling of inexpressible joy in what we can be in the future as we join seven congregations in hope for Dominican life and mission for the needs of the world.



*Sr. Ann Metzen, Great Bend
(attended Columbus)*

It was great to get to go to Columbus and to see the grave of Mother Angela Sansbury (the foundress of the Kentucky congregation). It was wonderful to get to see everyone and share with them. Everything was so well done, it is hard to select one thing as a highlight, but the closing ritual was certainly among the highlights of the weekend.



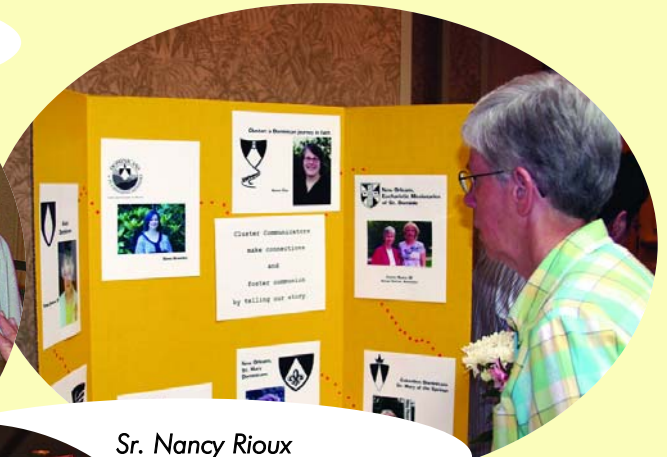
*Sr. Ruth Anne Rezek, Kentucky
(attended Columbus)*

Images

From the Intercongregational Gatherings



Srs. Rita Imelda Sullivan, Joanne Hohenbrink, & Esther Calderon



Sr. Nancy Rioux



Sr. Joel Christoph



Srs. Cathy Arnold & Margie Davis



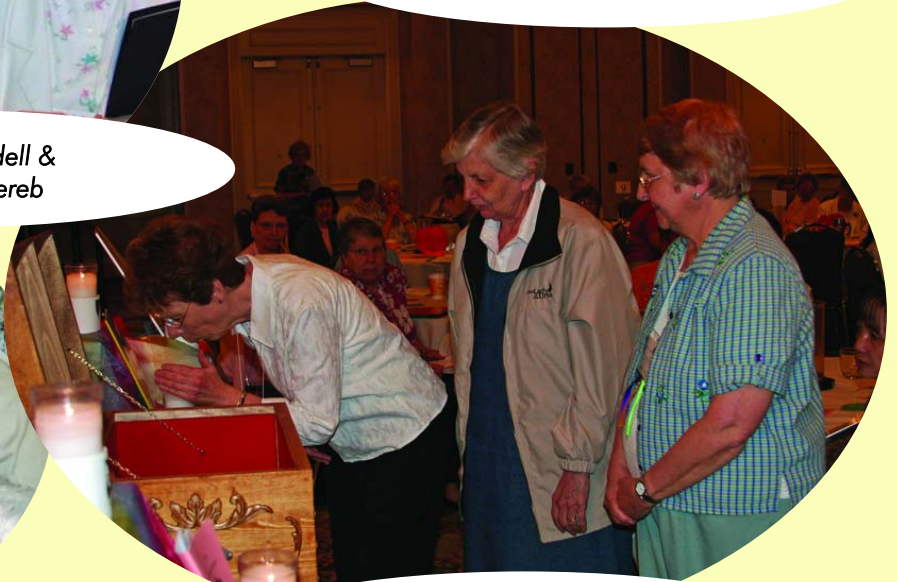
Srs. Mary Hilary Simpson & Noël Toomey



Srs. Judith Lindell & Joan Marie Jereb



Srs. Marie Granger & Thomas Marie Shelley



Srs. Diana Culbertson, Joanne Lamert & Bernie Baltrinic

Fun Facts

Sisters with Sisters

Over the years, many blood relatives have joined our congregations – sisters, step sisters, aunts and nieces, cousins

Currently there are 46 sets of “Sisters with sisters” in our seven congregations.

Let us celebrate these family connections as we all live into a broader understanding of family among ourselves.

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| Srs. Ann & Ellen Bailie (COL) | Srs. Alice, Jane, & Mary* McCaffrey (COL) |
| Srs. Bernadine & Betty Baltrinic (AK) | Srs. Joan & Mary Vesta* McGough (COL) |
| Srs. Camillus* & Corona Bayer (GB) | Srs. Kevin Marie* & Padraic Mary McGuinness (COL) |
| Srs. Catherine, Denise, & Sylvia Bourgeois (NOSM) | Srs. Christine & Theresa McManus (KY) |
| Srs. Alvarita* & Bertilla Brungardt (GB) | Srs. Charles Francis & Rose Frances* McOsker (KY) |
| Srs. Dorothy* & Virginia Burgardt (GB) | Srs. Helen Colette & Jerome* Melkon (OX) |
| Srs. Bernadette & Mary Joel Campbell (COL) | Srs. Agatha* & Rose Miller (AK) |
| Srs. Marie & Theresa Damicone (AK) | Srs. Clara & Cyprian* Mohan (COL) |
| Srs. Dolores & Mary Petra Flavin (COL) | Srs. Georgia* & Sibyllina Mueller (GB) |
| Srs. Agnes Imelda & Wilhelmina Frohnapfel (COL) | Srs. Anne & Marie Andre Murray (COL) |
| Srs. Edna* & Markita Haefling (GB) | Srs. Caroline* & Hermina Oeding (GB) |
| Srs. Beatrice* & Irene Hartman (GB) | Srs. Alma Marie* & Aniceta Pitstick (COL) |
| Srs. Connie & Dominic Haug (GB) | Srs. Barbara Ann & Nancy Rioux (KY) |
| Srs. Amadea* & Edith Marie Hauser (GB) | Srs. Bernadine & Rosemarie Robinson (AK) |
| Srs. Juanita & Rosemary* Henley (AK) | Srs. Anne & Mary* Rutledge (COL) |
| Srs. Adrian Marie & Margaret Marie Hofstetter (KY) | Srs. Corinne & Dolores Staub (COL) |
| Srs. Mary Carol, Venard, & Vivian* Kessler (COL) | Srs. Francine & Rita Schwarzenberger (GB) |
| Srs. Estelle* & Patricia Kilbane (KY) | Srs. Ann Bernardine & Margaret Philip Shaw (KY) |
| Srs. Marie, Marie Antoinette, & Ruth Klein (GB) | Srs. Mary Michael and Stella Spangler (COL) |
| Srs. de Chantal & Linda Lorenz (COL) | Srs. Malachy and Petrona Stockemer (GB) |
| Srs. Rita Agnes & Rita Ann* Masse (COL) | Srs. Charlotte and Eleanor Unrein (GB) |
| Srs. Coletta & Lucy* Masterson (GB) | Srs. Louise and Maryjane* Werner (AK) |
| Srs. James Vincent* & Kathleen Mattingly (KY) | Srs. Helen and Louise Wilxman (COL) |

* deceased

Decisions Made Thus Far

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|---|--|
| Our new name: | Dominican Sisters of Peace |
| Leadership, Human Resources, Finance, Communications, Mission Advancement, & Information Technology offices location: | Columbus |
| Archives (for the new congregation) office location: | Oxford |
| Dominican Life & Mission and Sponsored Ministries offices location: | Kentucky |
| Extended Relationships, Formation, and one Vocation offices location: | Akron |
| Our new Human Resources Director: | Maureen Trimble |
| Our new Finance Director: | Joe Scott |
| Our new Economic Council members: | Denise Bourgeois, OP; Katherine Elsner; Judith Lindell, OP; William Marquis, OP; Tim Moller; Mike Stelmack; John Stoner; Marie Jeanne Surette, OP; Larry Walker |
| | Ex Officio: Suzanne Brauer, OP; Anne Kilbride, OP; Gene Poore, OP; Joe Scott |
| Our approved departmental plans: | Vocations, Formation, Communications |

Ministry of Presence: Katrina Recovery Project

As national media focused on New Orleans after Katrina, the Eucharistic Missionaries knew that St. Bernard Civil Parish, adjacent to the south and east of the city, had to be in major trouble. They had ministered among the fishing communities perched along the bayous there for more than 60 years. Their dread was confirmed when the National Guard and FEMA finally entered the region several days later. Flooding from the Lower Ninth Ward and an enormous tidal surge from the Gulf had submerged the whole parish – 30 miles long – under 15-25 feet of water.

The Dominican Life and Mission Committee invited one Sister from each founding congregation to spend a week in St. Bernard. Srs. **Dot Trosclair** (NOEMD) and Mary Keefe (Adrian Dominican now ministering in the area) facilitated the immersion of six volunteers: **Srs. John Marie Charniga** (OX), **Juanita Henley** (AK), **Ann Metzen** (GB), **Margie Millet** (NOSM), **Mai-Dung Nguyen** (KY) and **Loretta Sullivan** (COL).

Following an orientation, the Sisters went out in pairs, going door to door equipped with brochures about assistance programs, gift cards donated by our members, and listening hearts. “We met wonderful people and really tried to focus on just listening,” Sr. Loretta shared. “They preached to us.” Survivors told of evacuation ordeals, demolished homes, and the scattering of family and friends assumed to be rooted forever in this remote area.

Every evening the seven recounted stories of death, destruction, and loss. They also described the unassuming heroism they had observed: faithful, resilient bayou people rebuilding their homes and lives after the worst natural disaster of the century within U.S. borders. After their last evening meal of the week, the Sisters prayed in gratitude and blessed each other, their minds and hearts bound by their ministry of presence in St. Bernard, just two months before the Summer ‘08 Intercongregational Gatherings.

Photos and more details about the Ministry of Presence are available online through www.domlife.org.

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