

**Letter to the Dominican Sisters from
Friar Aniceto Fernández, OP, Master General
November 12, 1968**

(Translated from Spanish by Helena Sause, OP)

Dear Sisters,

The General Chapter asked me to send a letter to respond to the petitions and suggestions which you have proposed.

I am pleased to do so since your petitions to the Capitular Brethren and your confidence in them were very effective during this very difficult time of renewal in our Order in order to respond more effectively to the needs of the present time.

Our American Sisters were showed great cordiality to the Capitular Brethren at Rosary College in River Forest, while in Sinsinawa and Racine the value of close relationships among the Brethren and the Sisters was clearly manifest. Moreover all the Capitulars were aware that the sisters of diverse congregations follow our labors, difficulties, and passions with much love and benevolence.

On various occasions our Brethren glimpsed how united the Sisters have been in the search for the will of God with respect to the Dominican Family. Our vocation demands that all those things which we wish to renew be equally adjusted, especially those which refer to Contemplation and the Mission. It seems to me best to use the spirit and tradition given us by Saint Dominic as a measure, and to search together with the Sisters for new forms in which to live our common vocation.

The renewal of the Order, as with all human and Church issues, cannot be realized without sacrifice. Nor can there be any other way for those who follow in the footsteps of Christ. We already know that the trials suffered together greatly strengthen apostolic hope.

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Now let us clarify the principal issues you sent to the Chapter Fathers.

1. First, the General Chapter does not have the power to renew the Constitutions and privileges of the Congregations. The competency of the General Chapter extends solely to the Constitutions of the Brethren.

Nevertheless we believe that it is an opportune time to be more conscious of the unity of our Dominican Family and its diversity shown in the abundant graces which the Holy Spirit has showered on our Congregations. The Brethren joyfully recognize the identity of the Dominican vocation in this fertile abundance of charisms which mutually complement each other, ranging from the contemplative life to the life consecrated to the neediest human beings. Preaching itself rises equally from the contemplation of God's mystery and the love for others. We also know that evangelical ministry among those

same others should bear fruit because of the Sisters' testimony. For this reason the Sisters have a certain right to ask for the help of the Brethren.

Perhaps at no other time has the Dominican Family been aware how to better live their own unity within the diversity of the Order. At the same time as women assume the responsibility of the Church's mission as their own, our Sisters also wish to participate in the work of the religious and apostolic renewal of the Order. This desire should be received gratefully by the Brethren and the Sisters in order to initiate closer collaboration.

Without prejudging the question of the Order carefully constructing a plan or basic common text of fundamentals, the Chapter did not judge it opportune to produce such a document. We are dealing with an extremely complicated issue if we consider the unity of spirit and the plurality of forms in the Dominican Family, such as we have recorded above. Since some Congregations already have consulted with the Brethren and are working on the renewal of their constitutions and in some countries Sisters have jointly realized common plans, the Chapter prudently thought it best to leave the Sisters at liberty to finish by themselves a search already begun.

Attending to the expressed wish of various congregations, the Sisters can, preserving care not to lose the values of their proper charisms, ground themselves in the Constitutions elaborated by the Brethren. The Chapter heartily thought that the fundamental Constitutions, the same order of the book of the Constitutions and even some other texts which speak of the basics, could inspire one in the spirit of Saint Dominic.

Moreover there is also a desire that the lived experiences spread here and there may serve as a stimulus in the work of renewal.

2. Together with the collaboration and other desires manifested by some congregations, the Sisters could proceed with the institution of an international secretariat, composed of members elected among themselves; this could be a help to the Brethren.

3. Collaboration among the Sisters

The General Chapter expects that sisterly collaboration among the Congregations with their diverse contributions could produce not only common plans for an apostolic Order, but also a common life for the Sisters and a common plan for formation.

It would also make the Chapter happy to see initial attempts toward a federation of the Congregations; they think that such a federation would be a valuable catalyst for the life of the Sisters and for a more effective apostolate.

➤ 4. Apostolic Collaboration between the Sisters and the Brethren

A mission in today's world requires the Brethren and the Sisters to consider everything that might lead to a life closer to the spirit of Saint Dominic.

Each day the Mission demands better technical, intellectual, and apostolic preparation -- a preparation which brings with it a formation which the Sisters cannot possibly acquire during their present short institutional preparation for religious life. The effort put forth by the congregations to achieve this preparation is a sign of their complete willingness to faithfully exercise an apostolate in accord with the needs of the Church.

The Mission cannot be realized fully without a close collaboration of diverse charisms and ministries. This is the reason that the General Chapter expressed the apostolic need for collaboration between the Brethren and the Sisters – a collaboration which demands a common plan of projects. In this way the Provinces can give help to the Sisters in seeing the needs of the world of today.

5. Liturgy and Prayer

One attempts to find the spiritual equilibrium necessary for our apostolic mission by a deep examination. May our prayer nourish our apostolic love and may the needs and intimate desires of today's world have an echo in our prayer.

To adapt work to the present needs can better sanctify the time.
May our apostolic prayer of thanksgiving or of petition nourish us at the same fount of the Divine Word.

The Chapter has encouraged the Sisters that, without prejudicing their liberty to realize their own experiences, they freely consult the Brethren *periti* for materials.

There is value in our desired union in prayer and it can enlighten the liturgical renewal in our convents according to the norms of the new Constitutions.

The mission of the Dominican Family is unique, even though it is composed of diverse groups. All of us-- the Brethren, the congregations of Sisters whether contemplative or active and apostolic, ought to serve the same, unique Gospel. The present circumstances in which we bear the Gospel, to a world full of anxiety move us to search together for the ways most apt to live our family's communion and apostolic collaboration.

This is the sign of divine love among us.

Dear Sisters, may the Virgin Mary, joyfully obedient in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, open the hearts and the lives of our communities to experience the heavenly inspirations of the Holy Spirit, during this life, until God's Reign comes. May our mutual prayer for each other maintain us in vigilant hope.

With the fraternal blessing of Saint Dominic,

Fray Aniceto Fernández, O.P.
Master of the Order