

Responses to Fr. Dan Ward OSB's video

May 2006

Participants: Sisters: 164 Associates: 3

Cluster Communities participating: Akron, Columbus, Great Bend, Kentucky, Eucharistic Missionaries New Orleans, St. Mary's New Orleans, Oxford

Three responses were incomplete as to numbers participating, which video was viewed, etc.

1. What information from Dan Ward's presentation do I want to share in the quilting circle that gives me a new perspective on reconfiguration?

Union and Federation

Union seems more appropriate for apostolic congregations moving into the future. In a union, individual congregations do not "dissolve" but rather "absorb together" in a creation of something new. (2) Diocesan congregations can become a part of a new entity and bring all their assets with them without loss. Members do not have to re-take their vows, though there could be a commitment ritual. This is very positive – a new entity coming forth as the other fades away. (2) It is a gentler passing, less painful transition. It may not happen in our lifetime but we leave something behind to bloom forth into something new.

If union is chosen, we can establish a transitional government,(3) rather than wait on the whole structure to be complete. Time Line 2010 is too long. Can't afford to wait until all is completed; need transitional legislation to enable movement of life which is always ongoing, changing, never static. If the wish is to move forward toward something new, whatever that will be, the transition needs to start to take place and the technicalities can be worked out later.

Insist that the new potential community should design its future, according to the members who will make it up. In a reconfigured community there is potentially more energy available, more talent, and possibly more vision for greater outreach for new missions. There may also be a loss of the bonds in existing communities.

We need to do cultural (personal), legal (canonical and civil) and ministry (dialogue on enabling process) audits. (3) We need an enabling process for chapter and leadership. (2). We need a dissolution clause.

It is easier to rewrite than to amend constitutions. (2)

Fewer in leadership

Emphasis is to be on the "body" or congregation moving forward, taking financial assets with it, while providing for the minority who stay behind. The congregation chooses union, not the individuals in the group.

Of outstanding significance is the fact that at our congregational chapters the final vote, the majority vote, on whether or not we continue in the Cluster process will rule, will determine the future for every one of us – even if there are some members in our congregations who may wish to remain as they are, or are still uncertain or say that they need more input at the local level. The

final vote of the chapters must be respected with the accompanying choices: the sister agrees to be a member of the new congregation, she may ask to transfer, or she may be dispensed from her vows. Individual congregations, as we knew them will have dissolved. However, financial assistance will be provided to those who do not support the union, but not so as to jeopardize the larger group. Consideration for those who do not want to reconfigure must be proportional and charitable.

It is sad for sisters who made their first profession years ago – professed for a lifetime, but cannot, will not, move ahead. However, those that choose not to are doing what they believe they are called to do. Yet many are saying, where you go I will go. I may not like what the congregation is doing but I have stayed. I am dedicated to the congregation.

What if 20% who choose not to join the new are the younger sisters? They would be more able to financially take care of themselves. People have many and good reasons for resisting.

Congregational entities join together, not individuals. Those individuals who choose not to join don't remain as the original community.

Regions may be governmental or relational.

Originally, federations were meant to protect autonomy of monasteries. Federations were for security; union is for growth. Federation could be compared to burying our talents and union is risking what we have to share and spread. Federations don't provide for the future as much as they protect the present. They don't solve problems. Union is the better option for the future of religious life.

The current process is more involved than we need to take on at this time in our lives. We therefore do not support either Federation or Union, but feel we should concern ourselves with our own re-formation.

Diocesan/Pontifical

Non-canonical congregations are a step toward the goal of being pontifical and canonical.

Being canonical protects us. May be a protection from an authoritarian bishop. (2) Need to have everything included in our constitutions that we strongly support before seeking Vatican approbation. (2) Be aggressive and confident in our request so as not to invite any negative reaction from Rome. (2)

It is a gradual development. Quilting takes time and each person brings her own design to a quilting party. The quilt becomes entirely new. Pieces need to be joined if it is going to fit together. A new entity would have pieces of familiarity to each congregation. In quilting, what we bring together is more similar than we think. We know more of what we don't want, than what we do. Is there something higher for which we are striving? Are we concerned with mechanics? We are struggling with the mundane parts of it.

The longer this process takes, the more I lose interest and hope. Dan said the new reality is all possible and sooner than we project. I hope this message is heeded.

Become one in diversity.

We need to decide what we want to do and believe Canon Law will help us achieve it. Canon Law is to enable fidelity to the “call” – not to restrict response, nor to control. Plan in freedom and then pursue the implementation of plan. Avoid negative terminology, e.g. dissolution. Reconfiguration is a coming together, a seeking of union, a creation of the new. Laws are to make us free.

Get the enabling process approved; establish a transitional government which will serve until all facets of governance and community living are in place.

Dominican religious life is alive and well in the 21st century and growing better as it draws closer to God. Just the existence of the cluster is a model for a better way. No matter what we decide, life will change!

Dan alleviated fears, buoyed the participants, eased tensions.

2. What values, truths, and actions from this information might we piece into the quilt of reconfiguration?

Values

- Hope
- Covenant relationship
- Recommitment
- Solidarity
- Community life
- Continued service to God’s people through ministry
- Willingness to take risks
- Dream first, structure will follow
- Continuing communication
- Common good beyond our individual congregations
- Being one in our charism of preaching, teaching, and healing; to praise, to bless, to preach
- Dialogue, contemplation, and thinking positively about the future and the creation of something new
- Creation of a safe place for a variety of opinions among us so that meaningful options or ideas can be heard
- Integrity of congregations remaining intact as they moves from one way of being to another
- Neither rushing into it nor dragging our feet; putting nothing into stone right away
- Understanding for those sisters who do not want to join any new congregation; concern for assisting those who do not join new congregation

Truths

Quilt is made up of old things, bringing our past to make something new. When you make the squares, you cut some fabric away. We need to decide what to keep and what to cut away.

Union would give hope and a sense of growth and is very Dominican

We take our roots with us

No one wants a 51/49 vote on structure alone

Collective wisdom of all will assist us in what our desires might be

Chapter is the voice of the Congregation

Where is creativity? The models that we are considering are what we know, what is already in place somewhere. The energy for creating something new has to come from within us. Yet we seem to want someone else to create it and give it to us. Perhaps the burst of creativity in the late 1960s and 1970s that led to so many creative ministries has given us a “been there, done that” attitude toward religious life. We know the work that will be involved in the choices we make.

Why? What is the long-term hope or goal? This is not negative – just an effort to look at future hopes

We are in a comfortable rut, fear leaving our comfort zones

Actions

Go forward in trust and hope to an unfolding future

Seek the common good of the body in the needs and thoughts of the members

Recognize the values of being a canonical and pontifical institute

Be cognizant that the rights of the members and the congregation are expressed in the decision-making power of the general chapters

Understand that the new structures are canonical, but must also be interpreted and implemented relationally

Conduct cultural, legal, and ministerial audits that will enable a cross section of needs/differences to be addressed

Consider: corporate stances of individual communities, relationships with benefactors, newsletters and publications, ongoing gatherings to sustain relationships among ourselves, celebration of jubilees, care centers and other ministries, questions of leadership selection, regions and/or provinces, finances, formation programs, all levels of living and working together, etc

I do not resonate with this symbol.

3. How do I personally need to be reshaped so these can be part of the quilt? How does my congregation need to be reshaped?

Personal

- I need a complete turnaround
- I need to grow in trust to be able to accept whatever changes are required in the transition
- I need to trust and truly believe that what God has begun, she will bring to perfection
- I need to be willing to let go
- I need to be open to new ways and new insights
- I need to be patient with those who are not open to the process, patient with the timing of the process
- I need to be open and accepting of all the personalities that make up the design of the quilt

- I need to think more globally (2)
- I need to respect what each person is saying; be open to seeking and listening to the insights of membership, especially those who think differently, until consensus comes
- I need to have a positive attitude on how can I contribute
- Personally I will be reshaped by just remaining open to the process

Congregational

- Congregations need to grow in trust to be able to accept whatever changes are required in the transition
- We have been reshaped through our recent experience of being displaced (by Katrina) and welcomed (by Houston)
- Congregations need to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the decision of the whole
- Congregations need generosity of spirit to be flexible when the rubber hits the road
- Congregations need to think more globally (2)
- Congregations need to be more open-minded, thinking of how it will affect the whole.
- Congregations need to think of the common good
- Congregations need to trust that the Spirit will lead us where God wants us to be. When we do that, we find that we can accept a great deal.
- Re-shaping will be on-going. It will not stop for congregations just because a decision is made
- Congregations will be reshaped by just remaining open to the process, listening to all individuals until arriving at consensus

4. What message might we want our quilt to proclaim? Are there words or sayings that we might wish to embroider into our quilt?

We would want it to be appealing and attractive to others, representative of the four corners of the globe

We would want it to look Dominican and expressive of cultural diversity

Prayer	Hope (2)	Unifying
Truth	Peace	Courage
Openness (2), listening, Dialog	Love	Witness
Faith	Onward, anticipation	Perseverance
Trust (3), journey of faith	We are one	Steadfastness
	Knowledgeable	Simplicity of lifestyle
	Unfolding, transformation	

Our Lady of Prompt Succor, hasten to help us

God help us all

We place our trust in you; we entrust ourselves together in darkness

Liberating truth of the Gospel

Pregnant to bring forth new life

God has plans for us, a future full of hope (Jer. 29:11)

Accept the truth no matter who says it

In a union, the parts are no longer isolated but joined together, as we hope to become one in eternity

We are like a large rainbow, joined together as sisters of Dominic – one family

We share who we are as we come to be

Unity can produce a beautiful result when we are all working for the same goal

Reconfiguration is a journey in faith and trust in God and in each other

If we look for surprising goodness we'll find what we are looking for; God has and is doing great things in us

If we remain faithful to our Dominican charism, the beauty and design and proclamation will happen. The best is yet to come.

The more the quilt reflects the blocks of each congregation the more the power and vitality of Dominican life will offer a broader witness to the world