Meeting the Charism Again/For the First Time
Dominican Foundations

Sent on Mission

"...we must take the dangerous and costly step of opening ourselves to the other, of enfolding him or her in the same embrace with which we have been enfolded by God."

Chris McVey, O.P.
IN THE TRADITION of the apostles, all Christians are sent on mission. Whenever the worshipping community gathers for eucharist it is sent on mission "to love and to serve." In the Dominican tradition this mission is named preaching, and love and service are its heart.

Thoughtful preaching relies on words and their careful use. At other times good news is proclaimed in the silence of respectful listening, with the presence of solidarity, or through the reaching out of hands. "Hands are a projection of what is in our heart," observed the present successor to St. Dominic in the Order of Preachers, Argentinian friar Carlos Aspiroz Costa. To be sent on mission is an invitation to use heart and hands and voice to embrace and to lift up, to bless and to heal, to feed and to shelter, to offer and to receive, to proclaim and to pray. It is love of God expressed in love of neighbor.

To be sent on mission is an invitation to "go to the ends of the earth," which means going beyond the limits of present understanding. Itinerant preachers, whose hearts and hands are open in freedom to accept the call, journey to the furthest edges of the familiar. By engaging with the challenges they face in difference and otherness, their perspective on life and mission is enlarged. In the early 16th century friar Antonio de Montesinos and three companions were sent from Spain to Santo Domingo, in the Caribbean. Their story inspires all who, in confronting injustice, seek courage to preach the gospel with integrity.

In 1508 these Dominican friars stirred up controversy first by establishing their new community among the indigenous, rather than the conquerors, choosing to live among the poor rather than the powerful. Yet, their mission was to all of God’s people. Their experience of living alongside the oppressed demanded that their preaching of God’s justice and love had to address the abuses they witnessed.

Representing the conviction of his entire community Montesinos boldly preached about the moral consequences of the circumstances they observed: colonists had enslaved the native peoples, treating them in a cruel and inhuman manner. The courage it took to speak so directly inspired another Spanish priest, Bartolome de Las Casas, to divest himself of his property and slaves, and to take up the cause of human rights for Indians. Las Casas eventually became a Dominican, dedicating himself first to a long period of contemplative prayer and study, and then zealously embracing the gospel mission to pursue justice and freedom for all through advocacy, teaching, preaching and writing.

THIS IS ALWAYS the purpose, and the effect, of being sent on mission. It is to listen, observe and experience, and then to speak the truth in light of the gospel.

Dominicans continue to give the same visibility and voice to the gospel values of justice and peace in partnership with others who share a similar mission. They participate locally in many nations throughout the world, and also advocate for justice and peace on an international level as participants in the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland.
Disciples are sent on mission to proclaim God’s word. At the same time they are also sent in search of God’s word, believing that it will be found among those to whom they are sent. Among refugees and migrants, ethnic and racially divided masses crowding new urban centers, the disenfranchised or the desperately poor, others reveal with their lives what is concealed by the structures of power: that what benefits the few is always at the expense of the many, who often exist at the edges of security or survival. They show the world what it means to be forgotten and invisible, excluded and exploited.

For those who are sent on mission, the skills most needed are the same today as when Dominic sent out his first itinerant preachers: an ability to offer the hospitality of an open heart, a mind that has been formed by contemplative prayer and study, community and ministry, and a willingness to dialogue. Then the word proclaimed as presence is a sign that God remembers, sees and hears. The word proclaimed as service can be a sign that God embraces and lifts up. The word proclaimed as love is a sign that God blesses and heals.

Being sent on mission is an opportunity to be changed by being with others as neighbors and friends. It widens horizons and ensures that nothing can ever be seen as it was before. It is no longer possible to pray only for self, or for the needs of one’s own circle separate from the needs of others. Prayer must be offered for the whole community of life, for the entire universe.

To be sent on mission is an act of faith and hope. In the earliest years of the Order, Dominic sent preachers wherever the gospel needed to be heard. They were sent on mission to all who hungered for truth, who longed for justice, who yearned for peace. They were encouraged to go toward those within the church whose understanding of the gospel had become distorted. They were also encouraged to go toward difference and to enter into dialogue with persons who had been formed in other cultures and other religions, who held other views. The gospel they were sent out to preach offered words of compassion and hope, freedom and truth, life and love. These are still words the world longs to hear today.

Dominic taught by word and example how contemplation was the foundation of mission. In a church and a world mired in conflict and corruption he believed that the truth of God’s mercy and justice would prevail. He believed that living in apostolic community would support each member in learning to live interdependently—with God and with others. Contemplation continues to widen one’s vision to see human interdependence with the entire earth community and with the universe.

Sent on mission, itinerant Dominican preachers carry with them a practice of contemplative prayer and study. This deepens their capacity for offering hospitality to what is other and new. They demonstrate how boundaries, both real or imagined, can be crossed and this enables them to forge genuine relationships and foster new life. Always their mission is named preaching, and love and service are its heart.
“I gave you EYES
to look at the beauty of creation.
I gave you EARS
to listen to me and to pay attention to
the needs of your neighbors.
I gave you a TONGUE
to proclaim my word.
I gave you HANDS
to serve your neighbors in their need.
I gave you FEET
to carry you to places that are holy and
useful to you.”

Catherine of Siena (Dialogue, 144)

“Our hope does not depend on success;
our hope is that God will act through us.”

Albert Nolan, O.P.

“The preferential option for the poor is
ultimately a question of friendship.
When we become friends with the poor,
their presence leaves an indelible imprint
on our lives, and we are much more
likely to remain committed.”

Gustavo Gutierrez, O.P.

Questions for
Reflection and Discussion

We seek partnerships with others whose mission
is compatible with the gospel.
• How do we focus the diverse energy and talents of all
  with whom we participate?
• What competencies and resources do we offer our partners?

We articulate how each aspect of organizational
life is essential for maintaining a focus on
mission.
• How are the values of Dominic evident in our internal
  and external relations?
• What promotes the visibility of our mission in the
  public realm?

We practice principles of governance that
democratic, collegial, and just.
• How is it evident that sharing power increases our
  effectiveness?
• What principles of leadership support our efforts to be
  empowering and not dominating?

We promote a consciousness of community that
embraces all of creation.
• How do we welcome diversity, promote equity and act
  for justice?
• What practices demonstrate our commitment to the
  Dominican values of contemplation, study, the common good
  and mission?
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Additional resources for
“Sent on Mission”
include the following:

• Mary Cabrini Durkin, OSU and Mary Nona
  McGreal, O.P., Always On Call: Samuel Mazzuchelli,

• Mary Nona McGreal, O.P., ed., Dominicans at Home in

• John Orme Mills, O.P., Justice, Peace and Dominicans:

• http://www.domlife.org

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