Meeting the Charism Again/For the First Time

Dominican Values

Building Community

“The Search — for self, for wisdom, for love, for truth, for justice, for God — is strenuous and unending. We need good companions in order to persevere in it. In good company, in a community of conviction, the quest never loses its relevance, its urgency, or its savor.”

Kaye Ashe, O.P.
FREEDOM and responsibility are key ingredients in building community. They provide a context for shared experiences of praying with and for others, dwelling in the Word, thinking deeply together about issues that matter, searching for truth, and serving neighbors. As relationships deepen, trust grows and confidence develops. This was Dominic’s way of building community and it continues all over the globe today.

Jesus taught his disciples about building community one person, one gesture, one word, one action, one prayer at a time. Dominic did the same. Both of them demonstrated a commitment to welcoming and reconciling, listening and speaking, healing and empowering, teaching and learning, seeking and finding, feeding and comforting. Jesus in the first century and Dominic in the 13th century called people to an experience of community rooted in hospitality and the desire of God for all of creation to experience the abundance of life.

Every disciple of Jesus is called to the mission of building community. Every follower of Dominic is called to practice the skills of building community. Community offers its members companionship and support. It also teaches them in practical ways about dwelling in the generosity and abundance God desires for all life on this planet, and assures that the gospel they preach comes out of that reality.

In 13th-century France Dominic found his own preaching mission as he traveled with his bishop, Diego. Wherever they went he observed the misery people struggled with in the rapidly changing landscape of church and society. Already a priest, he lamented widespread corruption in the church and how the gospel was being misrepresented, distancing believers from the love of God, and one another. He imagined a new way for people to encounter the gospel wherever they were in need of hearing its good news: preachers would travel to where they were, not bound by monastery or diocese. These preachers would live in community, be sent out on mission, and return regularly for intense periods of prayer and study. In this way both their contemplative and apostolic spirits would deepen. The rhythm of this movement between communal prayer and study followed by travel in their active ministry would keep them grounded and focused.

HISTORICALLY, Dominic founded first a monastery of nuns and then his Order of Preachers. Community was one of the essential elements of the life of both nun and friar. The nuns participated in the preaching mission through their constant prayer and study. Their life together provided the necessary encounters, struggles and support to deepen, test and practice their faith. Nourished and made strong by the spirit of confidence that grew among them, their prayer supported the friars who went out to preach among the people. The promise was that each would deepen in their love of God and the clarity of their call to mission through this experience of being transformed by the gospel.
TODAY every communal effort inspired by the humility and zeal of Dominic is committed to providing similar experiences, not only to share the life-giving benefits of community, but so all who participate can deepen and clarify their call to love God by loving others—those others who are present as well as those others who are distant, unknown, of another, or no, spiritual tradition. Bringing gospel truth and love to their efforts, while entering humbly and energetically into genuine dialogue, promises to nourish and strengthen their conviction and create a community where all are welcomed with respect. Among these communities ethnic and religious differences are treated with respect, never used as a means to divide or dominate, and wherever injustice is found, integrity gives courage to voice opposition and seek ways to challenge systems and change structures.

After centuries of denial and neglect human consciousness is awakening again to the realization that community embraces both human and non-human. As this renewed understanding captures the imagination of the present generation, appreciation deepens for the mystery of life’s profound dependence on earth for spiritual nourishment and physical survival. Science and the arts, spirituality and poetry, display renewed humility and reverence, and solidarity with the entire cosmos grows.

THE SEEDS of Dominic’s intellectual and missionary spirit continue to bring forth the fruit of new life. Institutions with long histories in the congregations and provinces of the Order of Preachers are led with enthusiasm and competence by a new generation of leaders. The gift of Dominic’s charism is reflected in their lives and their leadership. Others who share an enthusiasm for the communal search for truth are finding new avenues for building community for the sake of the mission in the 21st century. Persons and programs on every continent are linking their stories and in this way give new meaning to building community. Internet sites provide immediate access to resources and promote mission and community, history and scholarship, conferences and advocacy, news and needs. Youth and adults participate in National and International Volunteer programs, finding new ways to cross cultural borders and participate in building community. The Dominican N.G.O. at the United Nations provides a means for voices dedicated to truth and love to help build community on a wider scale. Pilgrimage to sacred sites in Dominican history, and to distant lands and different cultures where Dominic’s vision has brought together communities, reinforces identity and builds solidarity. What is revealed in all of this are the many roots and branches of this family story. All of these are signs of life and hope, generating new waves of energy, and evidence that building community in the tradition of Dominic continues—one person, one gesture, one word, one action, one prayer at a time.
BUILDING COMMUNITY...a manner of relating based on our recognition of the interdependence of all nature.

“If you want to see me, you must learn to know and love me here in my suffering humanity.”

Henry Suso, O.P. (1290-1365)
Dominican mystic and poet

“Our human pilgrimage to wholeness is not a solitary adventure, but an invitation to communion. It awakens us to our solidarity with all our human companions on the pilgrimage to wholeness. We help one another to see and to persevere.”

Paul Philibert, O.P.
U.S. Dominican theologian

“Learning to live together, and to go out beyond oneself: this allows those, who share intense experiences, to give the weight of flesh, the weight of their experience, to the words they use.... Giving words the weight of flesh, for me, that’s dialogue.”

Pierre Claverie, O.P.
Bishop, Oran, Algeria; assassinated, 1996

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

We nurture relationships which enhance the wellbeing of persons, the earth, and all beings.

- How do we demonstrate respect for a global culture by our participation in the local culture?
- Who are the others we must seek communion with so we can forge a common vision?

We communicate honestly, openly.

- How do we judge our standards for personal and public communication?
- What conditions invite the sharing of individual and shared wisdom?

We value cooperation over competition.

- How do we demonstrate our belief in facing issues together?
- What efforts can we make to promote spontaneity and freedom in participation?

We create and participate in networks that contribute to the common good.

- How do we deepen a genuine connectedness that leads to mutual enrichment?
- What cultural resources and ecumenical and interfaith relationships do we support?
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Additional resources for
Building Community

• Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., I Call You Friends, Continuum, 2001.
• http://www.op.org

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St. Dominic Receiving First Nuns Into the Order, 1216
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