

# Novitiate Module

Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic

2012

Province of St. Joseph

## Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic

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The “Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic” sets forth the basic charism of the Order of Preachers (Dominican Order) and how it is lived by the Laity. It expresses the life and purpose of the Dominican Laity.

It is important for the Novice to become familiar with the Rule in its entirety. The Rule forms the basic foundation for the Lay Dominican as one lives the life of commitment to proclaim God’s Truth.

### 1. *Origin & History*

When one completes the Novitiate year, one makes a promise generally within the context of the Eucharist, following the Liturgy of the Word of God and homily, with the following words:

*“To the honor of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of Saint Dominic, I, N.N., before you N.N., the President of this Fraternity/Chapter, and N.N., the Religious Assistant in place of the Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, promise that I will live according to the Rule of the Laity of Saint Dominic for three years.”*

After that time, one may be eligible to make Final profession.

When one makes a Promise to live by a Rule, it is wise to be familiar with the Rule, how it came about, and why it is necessary.

St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Both Aristotle and St. Thomas define man as a rational animal and by his nature a social animal. “...for Aristotle and St. Thomas human society is the natural outgrowth of human nature. Human society is made up of a hierarchy of human communities. The smallest and most basic is the family. The family assures the continuation of the human race...”

“To define the human person as a social animal is to link him to every other person in the human family.... To define the human person as a being, created in the image of God, the Creator, is to link him vertically to that infinite, creative Being.... Man, who is created in the image of God, finds fulfillment in knowing and loving God in this life, and in being united with Him in the next.” (Rev. Robert A. O’Donnell, C.S.P., Ph.D., *Hooked On Philosophy*)

Since man lives in a society, a family, a community, a fellowship, etc., there have to be rules which guide man’s conduct so that order is present in the community. “To ensure ethical behavior, each community must have an authority structure, laws and sanctions.” This applies to all societies, secular and religious.

“The basic regulations of a religious institute are found in its Rule. These regulations encompass the order of life and overall discipline of an institute, developed and amplified in its constitution. The most influential religious Rules were those composed by St. Basil, St. Augustine, and St. Benedict. Many subsequent religious Rules are based upon these early Rules.” (M.J. Stravinskis, Ph.D., S.T.L., *Our Sunday Visitor, Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1991)

The Rule of St. Augustine was adopted by St. Dominic and his friars in 1216. Augustine's Rule starts from: a bond of friendship between Christian souls, united by love of God and one's neighbor. Augustine's thinking was influenced by Acts 4:32: "...now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common." This is the thought underlying the opening of the Rule of St. Augustine which reads, "Before all else, dearest brethren, let God be loved and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments which have been given to us."

Reverend Richard Weber, O.P., in his history of the Dominican Laity, in Dominican Laity, History, Purpose, Spirituality, writes of the need for reform in the Church in the Middle Ages. There was evidence of superstitions, corruption, and ceremonies that were unchristian. Many of the clergy were poorly prepared for their leadership role and some were selling sacramental services. He writes of a "...lay reform movement which had no definite founders; it had no definite program except for a return to the Gospel..." The name generally applied to the movement at that time was "The Order of Penitence." "The origins of the Third Order can be found in this lay reform movement among the Penitents. The Third Order thus comes out of an unruly, pious evangelistic, radical group, men and women unhappy with the decadence of clergy and religious, repulsed by the formalism and superstition of the merely nominal 'Christians,' and deeply anxious to live a truly evangelical life. All the reforms of the later Middle Ages will have some connection with this movement. The Franciscan and Dominican movements will have a close relation with it."

"The Humiliati": The Humiliati were an order of penitents founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They followed the Rule of St. Benedict, wore a habit and were dedicated to living an austere life and the care of the poor. Some members insisted on the right to preach. The Humiliati were excommunicated for heresy in 1184. Pope Innocent III in 1201 reconciled a portion of the group to the Church... those who would preach had to become clerics and be ordained. Those who remained as laity would form a lay order of Humiliati. The latter were the first group to be called a "Third Order."

Some of the lay penitent groups, however, were drifting into heresy. "Munio de Zamora, Master General of the Dominicans at that time, decided that an organization of some sort had to be devised for these people. Accordingly, in 1285, Munio de Zamora published a 'Rule for Penitents of St. Dominic.' This is the foundation, the origin of the Third Order - 1285 is your birthday."

Master General Gillet, in his Encyclical Letter wrote: "Munio de Zamora defined the spirit of the Third Order when he said, 'it is not a devotion, but a religion. Because the Tertiary,' he said, 'is the special son in Our Lord of Saint Dominic, he must strive before everything else, in the measure of his power, to be a zealous propagator of the Catholic Faith.'" Gillett also wrote that, "...on the 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1401, Pope Boniface IX gave to the Third Order new and solemn approbation, ...in 1923, Pope Pius XI again gave it a Rule more suitable for our times."

Fr. Aniceto Fernandez, O.P., Master General of the Order in 1968 approved "Rule and General Declarations and Statutes of the Dominican Laity for The Provinces of Saint Joseph and Saint Albert of the United States of America." In 1987 "The New Revised Rule for the Dominican Laity" was approved by Father Damian Byrne, O.P., Master of the Order.

From what has been said we can appreciate that the Rule is not immutable. The essence remains but is adapted to changing social needs. Fr. Francis Wendell, O.P. in his book, "The Formation of a Lay Apostle," wrote, "Christ is still living in the world in another body, it is true, a mystical and mysterious body. The Catholic Church is not just an organization but an organism, a living body, with a life that is Divine."

## **2. Study of the Rule**

During the Novitiate Formation, each novice should own a copy of the "Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic." It is most important that the novice study it and come to live it because the promise made at one's Temporary Promise is a serious commitment to it. The Rule should be studied with an openness and earnestness of mind and heart.

Even during the Postulancy (inquiry) period of Formation (usually six months to one year), it would be wise for every aspirant to obtain a copy of the document. It would be enlightening for them to be able to see, from the beginning of their formation, the fundamentals of this most special vocation.

In preparation for the Final Promise of candidates, the Formation team should plan several instruction sessions concentrating on the basics of the Rule. It would be a review with an emphasis on the seriousness of the promise which is made. The Temporary Professed will be evaluated as candidates to make a life commitment. It is hoped that at this point in their life as Dominicans, they will be excited about their call to bring the Word of God wherever the Holy Spirit leads. They will have grown to love and faithfully live the “Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic.”

### **3. Brief Review of the Rule**

The Rule of the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic, when promulgated by Fr. Damian Byrne, O.P. (then Master General of the Order) on January 28, 1987, was purposely written using simple and brief statements to basically encompass the role of the Laity within the Order of Friars Preachers. It presents the basic sources of Dominican spirituality and how that characteristic spirituality is applied and lived in the secular world.

“The Rule of the Lay Chapters of Saint Dominic” is divided into three sections as follows:

- I. The Fundamental Constitution of Lay Dominicans
- II. The Life of the Chapters
- III. The Organization and Government of the Chapters

This Rule is observed by all Lay Dominicans throughout the world. The Rule of the Lay Fraternities within the Dominican Order incorporates the same spirituality and purpose which inspired our holy father, Saint Dominic.

The Rule will never change. However, Masters of the Order in concert with the International Congress of Lay Fraternities, may incorporate “General Declarations” to the Rule. The Lay Dominican is bound by one’s Promise to adhere to these Declarations as addendums to the Rule.

At the request of then Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos A. Aspiroz Costa, O.P., the Rule and Declarations of 1987 were studied by the International Congress of Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic held in Argentina in 2007. The purpose of the project was to assist the Laity in living the Rule by clarification of its present form “... *to fan anew the flame of the tradition and vocation of the Lay branch of the Order of Preachers* ...” (Rule: General Declarations, promulgated November 11, 2007, effective August 8, 2008).

The Declarations of 2008 identify the weight and accountability of one’s Lay vocation as a member in the Order of Friars Preachers. By means of one’s Promise, one is canonically obligated (without penalty of sin) to adhere to the Rule, Declarations, and Particular Directory of the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic. These Declarations are a call for those in Formation, as well as Formation teams, to deeply and prayerfully discern the validity of one’s vocation as a Lay Dominican.

The “Particular Directory” encompasses norms for Formation, election procedures, etc. Each Province has a Directory unique to their governmental circumstances. While similarities exist throughout the Order (e.g. election procedures, leadership offices, etc.), a Particular Directory identifies and enhances practices and procedures of the individual Province. The Norms contained within the Directory are approved by the respective Lay Provincial Council and promulgated by the Prior Provincial, with the authority of the Master of the Order. Particular Directories may (and should) be amended periodically to enhance members’ vocations and meet the changing needs of governmental structures within the Laity. The recent Particular Directory of the Province of St. Joseph was promulgated by V. Rev. D. Dominic Izzo, O.P., Prior Provincial, on the seventh of October, the year 2009.

#### 4. *Conclusion*

The person drawn to the Lay Fraternities is undoubtedly one who desires to grow in holiness through prayer and contemplation. Through the fruits of contemplation, one longs to draw others to a deeper love of God.

The Lay Dominican's Promise to live according to the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic is a promise which is freely made and gives the freedom of a life centered in God. The Rule is designed to bring about Christian perfection in life.

Let us keep in mind the words found in the Vatican II document, "Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World" ("Gaudium et Spes"), as presented in #942 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "By virtue of their prophetic mission, lay people are called...to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind" (GS 43 para 4).

What distinguishes the Dominican Order from other contemplative Orders is found in the Constitutions of the Order. "Our Order is known to have been founded from the beginning expressly for preaching and the salvation of souls." This is very clearly stated in the Rule.

It is most important that the aspirant to the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic keep in mind that the support of the Chapter community will be available not only during the early formation years. The members of the Chapter form a community which prays, studies, and carries out its various apostolates together.

#### **Thought/Study Questions:**

Purpose: To guide in the discernment of God's will for the candidate's life. Does one have a Dominican vocation?

1. Our Rule is more than just words. It is a way of life. Do you feel you are being called to this way of life?
2. How has your study of the Rule helped you to see why you may have been called to be a Dominican?
3. Why does membership in the Lay Dominicans differ from Church-related organizations (e.g. Blue Army, Knights of Columbus, Holy Name Society, etc.)?
4. Why is discernment of a Lay Dominican vocation so important?

#### **Suggested Reading:**

Hinnebusch, Wm. A. O.P., Dominican Spirituality, Principles and Practice. Washington, D.C. Dominicana Publications, June, 1965.

Radcliff, Timothy, O.P., Dominican Freedom and Responsibility. New York, NY: Dominican Province of St. Joseph, 1997. Reprinted from I.D.I., No. 353, July-Aug., 1997.

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Flannery, Austin, O.P., General Editor, Vatican Council II, "Pastoral Constitution On The Church in The Modern World", "Gaudium Spes", The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. St. Paul Editions. Boston, MA 02130: Daughters of St. Paul, 1975.

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Stravinskis, Peter M.J., Ph.D., S.T.L., Catholic Encyclopedia. Indiana: Our Sunday Publishing Division, Our Sunday Visitor, 1991.

Walsh, Michael, (editor), "St. Augustine", Butler, Lives of the Saints. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

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