

# Novitiate Module

Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic

2012

Province of St. Joseph

## Community” – Part A

### THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP in the LAY FRATERNITIES OF ST. DOMINIC

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#### A. *Community*

Community is the third Pillar of the Lay Dominicans and plays an important part in our vocations. Unlike the other branches of the Order, Lay Dominicans do not live in community. This is why emphasis is placed on the need to attend the monthly chapter meetings. In order to better define the importance of community in the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic, we will look into why community is important.

Community has existed since the beginning – that mysterious beginning of which the Apostle John writes: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (Jn1:1-2) Thus the Trinity: Father-Creator, Son-Redeemer and Holy Spirit-Sanctifier, is the first community. Man is born into community life already ages old preceded by legions of angels, plants and creatures of the land, sea and sky. Species in community are called by many names – flock, herd, clan and tribe. Foremost among them is “family.”

Family is at once the smallest and the largest of communities. It is the family unit of parents and children who form our first structured community experience. Each family member has a contributing role. The family of humankind encompasses human creation from beginning to end. People living together and/or sharing similar interests and work, comprise the elements of community. We experience community in our neighborhoods, schools, work and in the church.

Jesus stated, “I am the vine, you are the branches.” (Jn15:5) “From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection of and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of the love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . .”<sup>1</sup>

“Much was done by the Second Vatican Council to bring about a clearer understanding of the Church as communion and its concrete application to life.”<sup>2</sup>

“*The reality of the church as communion is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the ‘mystery,’ or rather, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. For this purpose ecclesial communion cannot be interpreted in a sufficient way if it is understood as simply a sociological or psychological reality. . . . The bonds that unite the member of the New People among themselves – and first of all with Christ – are not those of ‘flesh and blood,’ but those of the spirit, more precisely those of the Holy Spirit, whom all the baptized have received.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, (December 30, 1988), accessed 8/18/12. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). #18

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. #19

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. #19

“Church communion, already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful’s working together in groups, that is, in activities done with others in the course of their responsible participation in the life and mission of the church.”<sup>4</sup>

“In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, in which the Christian faithful, either clergy or laity, or clergy and laity together, strive by common effort to promote a more perfect life, or to foster public worship, or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other pastoral works, namely to engage in efforts of evangelization . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

“The Dominican Order is a family, composed of faith-filled man and women in a multitude of circumstances and geographical locations throughout the world. All are called to serve the Lord in a special way, following the path of our father, St. Dominic. Each member is a contributor to the overall work of the Order and lives according to the Rule for their particular branch. Critical to the Rule of the Order is the concept of ‘community,’ the foundation of the unity upon which the work depends.”<sup>6</sup>

“Religious members of the Dominican Order – friars, brothers, nuns and sisters – live in physical community and share all things in common, as St. Dominic set forth from the beginning of the Order. . . . For us in the Dominican laity, the chapter to which we belong is our local community, and all the chapters together form the larger community of lay Dominicans in the Province.”<sup>7</sup>

“Associations, whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction of that same institute, are called third orders or some other appropriate name.”<sup>8</sup>

“The profound reason that justifies and demands the lay faithful’s forming of lay groups comes from a theology *based on ecclesiology*, as the Second Vatican Council clearly acknowledged in referring to the group apostolate as a ‘sign of communion and of unity of the Church of Christ.’”<sup>9</sup>

The Lay Fraternity of St. Dominic attracts most of its membership by reason of location. The diversity of its membership determines the fraternity appeal to the inquirer. Fraternity members experience community similar to both the home unit and the religious house. It is a “coming together” in community to pray, study and share fellowship. It is a place where each may become a contributing member. It is a place from which to gain the knowledge, confidence and encouragement needed to take the Dominican mission apostolate – the message of Faith – into our home, work and community environments. The sign of communion and the unity of the Church of Christ are at the heart of every chapter and are, at the same time, the source of its life and the fruits of its apostolate.

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, (December 30, 1988), accessed 8/18/12. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). #29

<sup>5</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. 1995, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C. Canon 298

<sup>6</sup> Mc Garry, Debra. “Our Chapter, Our Community,” Postulancy Module 4, Fraternities of St. Dominic, Province of St. Joseph. 2006

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. 1995, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C. Canon 303

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, (December 30, 1988), accessed 8/18/12. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). #29

## B. *Leadership in Community*

The current Rule of the Dominican Laity gives new privileges and responsibilities to its members. It reflects the attitude of the Church regarding the Catholic laity in today's world. The revised Rule follows the publication of the Documents of Vatican II held in Vatican City beginning 1962. The Order of Preachers studied the 1923 Rule for Dominican Tertiaries and determined an experimental revised Rule in 1968. The final draft was promulgated in 1987. Continuing to support the needs of the Church, the International community of Lay Dominicans issued "*General Declarations Regarding the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic*" in 2007, at the request of and promulgated by then Master of the Order, Most Rev. Carlos Aspiroz, O.P., in 2008.

Leadership is needed to give structure and order to a group and its activities. Indeed leadership may be called a commitment to the order of the Order. Whether within the family, Church hierarchy, or national elected government, a system of leadership is needed to facilitate the mechanism of the body. The roles of leaders should be well defined and provisions be made for teaching future leaders. Every unit handles present needs and prepares for the maturing roles of its members.

Within specific limitations of the Order, the Lay Dominican units are democratic and autonomous. Members elect a council who elect fraternity officers. Elected fraternity representatives make up the Regional Council who then elects its officers. Elected Regional representatives make up the Provincial Council, who in turn, elects its officers. The Provincial Promoter, as liaison between the Lay Provincial Council and the Prior Provincial, represents a uniting presence between these two communities in the Dominican family.

Leadership is vital for the continuity of the Order. If we have no one to teach our successors, the unit will die. The Lay Dominican must realize that its leaders and teachers come from within the fraternity unit. The member should expect to share in this responsibility as fully Promised members. Leadership and teaching roles are learned functions. Practice and experience make the roles a more comfortable fit. Councils must make the unit environment a safe and encouraging place in which to learn and practice the skills needed for effective leadership.

The accepted premise that "leaders are born, not made" is a myth. Leadership is a learned accomplishment. It requires no special charisma or talent. Leadership is a response to needs that takes courage and effort. So the call to Dominican leadership via its council levels, like a call to Christianity, is not for the faint of heart. A leader teaches by example and directive. It is the leader's primary duty to live the Dominican example and pray for God's graces to speak and work in cooperation with God's will. The Dominican leader is expected to make decisions and to take initiatives. They are true to their commitment, however mundane some of its tasks.

There are more leaders in the Lay Dominican setting than are apparent. It is natural to think of a president or religious assistant as a leader. In fact every council member, committee chair, instructor, and guiding head of a group or activity is a leader in all levels of service – chapter, region or province. The farsighted leader constantly searches for his/her own replacement by educating the brothers and sisters to the duties of council and providing opportunities for committee and other learning experiences that build leadership capabilities.

## C. *Summary*

To a Dominican, community life is about becoming holy. Why? St. Dominic said it best, "to save one's soul and the souls of others." Spiritual growth and holiness occurs with others, not alone -- God also participates. Each individual in the community plays an important role in the destination of their community. Everyone's goal should be to work towards achieving God's Will in their lives and that of their chapter. It is not always easy, but it is always rewarding as each individual stays on the path toward the goal of saving one's soul. The goal of the members should be to work together, in humility and charity, to form a true community of faithful sons and daughters of St. Dominic and Holy Mother Church.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the first Community?
2. Why is it important to have community in the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic?
3. Why is leadership vital in the Dominican order for the continuity of the Dominican Order?
4. What is the leader's role in the Dominican Order?
5. How is leadership a learned accomplishment?
6. To a Dominican, why is Community life about becoming holy?

## Works Cited and Resources

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