
ORDER OF PREACHERS



Dominican Friars of the Apostolic College of Penitentiaries at the Basilica of St Mary Major, Rome



The History of the Dominican Friars of the Apostolic College of the Penitentiaries of the Basilica of St Mary Major, Rome.

1. HISTORY

The Apostolic College of the Liberian Penitentiaries, an entity of the Holy See entrusted to the Dominican Order, was instituted by St Pius V with the Bull *Pro nostri muneris officio* dated 1 September 1568. The original arrangement was to set up the Apostolic College of the Sacred Penitentiary of Saint Mary Major, Rome, to entrust it to the Dominican Fathers, with six Italian speaking priest penitentiaries and two co-operator brothers assigned to the Roman Province; these were subject to the Major Penitentiary with respect to the jurisdiction of their office, and to the Roman Provincial and his Vicar, the Prior of the Priory of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, with respect to their presentation and religious discipline.

The residence of the Dominican Penitentiaries for their use and benefit has changed in the course of history. In 1568, at the foundation, they received for their residence the building to the right side of the atrium of the Church of Saint Pudenziana on the present Via Urbana. On 29 October 1602 they moved to two adjoining buildings in a new healthier location in front of the Basilica on the present Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore. In fact, during the second half of the seventeenth century, the Penitentiary Father Gregorio Boncompagni transformed the construction adding one wing to the left-hand section. As a result of the enlarging of Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore and of the widening of Via Lateranense, today's Via Merulana, the present residence of the Penitentiaries was built during the years 1886 to 1889.

With the document, dated 29 August 1955, of the Major Penitentiary, His Eminence Cardinal Nicola Canali, the process began on the part of the Holy See for the changing of the College of Penitentiaries to be dependent on the Master of the Order. The number of candidates to be presented to the Apostolic Penitentiary was increased to twelve, belonging to different nationalities, so as to give a better service for pilgrims through confession in diverse languages: Italian, English, French, Spanish and German. On 8 December 1956, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the new configuration of the College was



established, with the presentation to the Apostolic Penitentiary of twelve new candidates nominated by Father Esteban Gomez, Vicar of the Master of the Order for the Roman houses. Finally, on 7 February 1972, the Master of the Order, Fr Aniceto Fernandez instituted the Priory of Saint Mary Major.

On 5 June 1993 the norms which regulate the Apostolic Colleges of the Ordinary priest Penitentiaries of the four Papal Basilicas of Rome, signed by Cardinal William Baum and lodged in the Apostolic Penitentiary, were communicated by the Holy See to the respective Superiors General. According to the norms, we – the Ordinary Penitentiaries of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major – are subject to the Master of the Order insofar as being Dominican Friars, to the Major Penitentiary insofar as Ordinary Penitentiaries. The assumption of, or dismissal from, office belongs solely to the Apostolic Penitentiary.

2. MINISTRY

Through the presentation by the Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, the Apostolic See has entrusted us with the mission of the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance as Ordinary Minor Penitentiaries of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. Our mission is carried out on 365 days of the year, with a personal timetable of morning and afternoon presence in the confessional for twenty four hours each week. Of the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, the Basilica of Saint Mary Major is the most frequented for confessions, in the first place by priests, men and women religious, and by reason of its geographical position by a great many penitents from every continent. Although the number of confessions has decreased compared with the final years of the last century, thank God those who come to receive the Sacrament of Penance are still very numerous, above all in the privileged times of Advent, Lent, Easter and Christmas, and on the first Fridays and Saturdays of the month. In the four Papal Basilicas, there has never been a break in offering the faithful the possibility of going to confession.

Each month the Apostolic Penitentiary makes it possible for the Minor Penitentiaries to attend a lecture to keep them updated on juridical and moral topics. During Lent the College itself also organizes lectures of a formative and spiritual nature for the community.

3. DAILY LIFE

The day revolves around the timetable of confessions: from 7 in the morning until 7 at night, with a break for lunch. Each Penitentiary has a day and a half of weekly rest, and during the summer enjoys six weeks break to cover his holidays and his week-long retreat. On Sundays and Holy days of Obligation all Penitentiaries are scheduled to be present. At 7 a.m. a Mass is celebrated in our Chapel; at 1 p.m. the community gathers for lunch; at 7.30 p.m. Vespers and Compline are recited in the Chapel and at 8 p.m. there is supper. Through an immemorial privilege the Community enjoys dispensation from assistance at the common celebration of Mass and the Divine Office, for the sake of the main obligation of the Penitentiaries: to hear confessions in the Basilica. Meetings of the Council are held regularly for the approval of financial accounts and for dealing with matters of the common life of the community.

We are fully aware of the doctrinal and pastoral responsibility we bear; it requires a commitment to good formation and a cultivated spirituality that exceed our own resources. In fact we entrust ourselves to the efficacy of divine grace, since in the end we are aware of being unprofitable servants, doing only with God's help what we are required to do. Community life proceeds with great serenity, thanks to our mission in the Basilica which helps us so much to seek in prayer interior and also exterior peace.

4. WE ARE DOMINICAN FRIARS

We deal with the Master of the Order, our Major Superior, directly through his Vicar for our community. It is the Master of the Order who proposes new members of the College to the Apostolic Penitentiary; we thank the Order for the care and concern that it takes to complete the number of Liberian Penitentiaries (twelve).

We are aware that not every priest is up to this task of hearing confessions, but we are confident that available and suitable friars will always be found to provide their very valuable service in the administration of the sacrament of mercy entrusted to our Order, continuing in our day this evangelical and ecclesial mission in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major.



We further thank the Order, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, for entrusting us with this delicate mission. It helps us so much to live the religious life with a sense of faith and self-giving for the salvation of souls, the supreme law of the Church and the fundamental and characteristic task of our Order of Friars Preachers.

At present the Apostolic College of Liberian Penitentiaries consists of:

Fr Timothy Brouwer, from the Province of the Netherlands;

Fr Norbert Castillo, from the Province of the Philippines;

Fr Pedro Fernandez, from the Province of Spain;

Fr Denis Hallinan, from the Province of Australia and New Zealand;

Fr Miguel Itza, from the Province of Spain;

Fr Edmund Jasiulek, from the Province of Poland;

Fr Hernan Jiménez, from the Province of Peru;

Fr Ludovicus Melo, from the Province of Slovakia;

Fr Elio Monteleone, from the Province of St Thomas Aquinas in Italy;

Fr Wojciech Morawski, from the Province of Poland;

Fr Salvatore Raciti, from the Province of St Thomas Aquinas in Italy.

Fr Pedro Fernandez OP, Prior (Rome, 22 December 2014)

• **Dominicanism: Online Course for IDYM Members**

In gratitude for your collaboration with DOMUNI, the Dominican University Online, we offer IDYM members, free of charge, a course about Dominicanism to support personal formation and to reflect together with other young people in this community study experience.

The course is aimed at all young Dominicans who are interested in exploring the life of Saint Dominic and the Order and his dedication to preaching. This is a great opportunity to access quality training and in an innovative way.

The course will run entirely on an online training platform from Domuni and therefore will need an Internet connection or access to it. Each participant will be asked to read or display materials from each one of the stages and relate their thoughts on the subject in their forum assigned by language: Spanish, English or French. You can access the training materials for all languages, but should only participate in the forum of the language chosen for the course. We also have additional reference materials and we can add those that are proposed by the students themselves.

We want to use this space as a place to study and share reflection, so it is important to have active participation of those entering the course. Since it is free, active participation is a commitment that must be accepted by every IDYM members who chooses to register for this course. They should also be able to read and write properly in the language of the course you choose: Spanish, English or French.

The course will be conducted in 3 stages of three weeks each, plus an initial stage for presentations and introductions. This organization gives enough time to develop each of the stages reflectively and without neglecting usual occupations and responsibilities. The stages are:

April 6-12, 2015 / Initial Stage: Introduction and Presentation of Students

April 13-May 3, 2015 / 1st Stage: Who is Dominic?

May 4-24, 2015 /2nd Stage: Preaching

May 25-June 14, 2015 / 3rd Stage: An Evangelized Institution

Enrollment

The number of students accepted is limited, 25 entries per language (Spanish, English and French), so it's important to register early to avoid running out of space in this unique opportunity. The registration will start on March 5 and end March 31 and the order of arrival of requests will be respected.



Registration will take place through an online form, which will be enabled starting from March 5th. All IDYM members who wish to register must also inform the national coordinator of their country after filling out the form. Every registration will be verified to ensure their membership in the movement.

For more information please contact:

Fr Michel Van Aerde op, michel.vanaerde@domuni.eu (English, French and Spanish)

Lyamar Díaz; IDYM Formation Chair, formation.idym@gmail.com (English and Spanish)

Jose Alberto; IDYM Coordinator, idym@curia.op.org (Spanish and English)

• Dominicans in Africa and the challenge of prophetic witness

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges consecrated persons to be prophetic witnesses in the Church and in the world. Our recent visit to the Vicariate General of Southern Africa and the Provincial Vicariate of Rwanda and Burundi (January 27 to February 8, 2015), allowed us to see how our Dominican brothers meet this challenge in this Year of Consecrated Life.

As happens every year, the brothers of the Vicariate General of Southern Africa held their annual Assembly at La Verna Retreat Centre in Vandelbiljpark, south of Johannesburg, from 27 to 30 January 2015. The brothers reflected on the Year of Consecrated Life. Among the speakers was fr. Albert Nolan, one of the elders and prominent theologian who has worked a lot on contextual theology. He addressed the assembly on the Theology of Consecrated Life. "To be prophetic witnesses", this is the meaning of the theology of the consecrated life, said fr. Nolan, emphasizing the significance and role of the prophet: a man chosen by God and not appointed; who is moved by the Spirit, speaks in the name of God, foresees the future and proclaims a message of hope from God. Our religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience must "speak to the world", insisted fr. Nolan. Renunciation, sharing, unconditional and universal love should lead us to solidarity and sharing with the poor.

The brothers in South Africa try to be prophetic witnesses through their prophetic apostolic commitments: Radio Veritas, helping poor children, orphans and AIDS patients (Saint Martin de Porres Development project, Khuleleni), the apostolate of deaf-and-dumb, and parish ministry. The Police Chaplaincy is another important place where there is need of true and strong prophetic witness, as it is to inculcate ethical and Gospel values, respect for human rights and the dignity of the person. In this milieu, there are many cases of suicide and depression. The chaplain, our brother Chaka is trying to be a prophetic witness through his attentive listening, counselling, and liturgical celebrations.

In Burundi the brothers seek to be prophetic witnesses through their prophetic apostolic projects like UBUNTU Centre which is a "laboratory of analysis and action for the promotion of Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi and the Great Lakes Region", Youth Providence AGAKURA project which takes care of marginalized youth. Their leadership on the Independent National Commission on Human Rights in Burundi (CNIHD) is certainly a mission and prophetic witness. As the president of the commission, fr. Emmanuel Ntakarutimana highlights, "to play the delicate interfacing role between state institutions, civil society organizations, international institutions and organizations, and the populations - it requires a great sense of independence." Talking about the ethical and Gospel values unknown or ignored in these environments is a big challenge and a prophetic witness. Fr. Emmanuel underlines the pertinence of the teachings of the prophets like Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah, in the context of his work; but also in the current situation where Burundi is preparing for presidential elections and where there are arrests, imprisonments and violence. In his homily on Sunday, February 1, 2015, fr. Emmanuel emphasized the role of the prophet, the watchman who foresees the new day and who is bearer of hope.

Finally, in Rwanda where we ended our visit, great was our joy to see the brothers going from the capital city of Kigali to the peripheries. The new community of Nyagatare in the eastern part of the country is settling gradually. As a sign of solidarity and sharing with the poor, the brothers allow peoples to cultivate freely the few hectares of the land of the priory to feed their families.

Moreover, community life and fraternal communion in our convents in Rwanda and Burundi are a prophetic witness in these countries marked by ethnic problems, "decades of cyclical violence with ethnic



connotations”, and the genocide of 1994. In this Year of Consecrated Life, may we be true prophetic witnesses and may our vows really speak to the world!

fr. Gabriel Samba, O.P.

• **Infocliop Bulletin: On Dominican Preaching**

The Bulletin of the International Liturgical Commission of the Order of Preachers (CLIOP)

On 14 July 2014, the Master of the Order, fr. Bruno Cadoré, inaugurated the new Liturgical Commission of the Order (CLIOP). This new Commission is chaired by me, fr. José Filipe da Costa Rodrigues, of the Province of Portugal. Other members include:

fr. David Caron (Province of St. Martin de Porres, USA), fr. Thomas Moller (Province of Teutonia, Germany), fr. Dominik Jurczak (Province of Poland), Sr. Ragnhild Bjelland (Dominican Sisters of Notre Dame de Grâce, Chatillon, Oslo), fr. Joseph Nguyen Van Hien (Province of Vietnam), fr. Manuel Eduardo Solórzano Zerpa (Vicariate of Venezuela, Province of the Holy Rosary).

The last two brothers were appointed as auxiliary members.

Some of us were already part of the previous committee but now the Master of the Order has asked us to collaborate with him to ensure the unity of the Order through its liturgical life. Beyond this more general task, in his letter of appointment, the Master of the Order asked the Commission:

- to promote the liturgical life in the Order,
- to monitor the work of the translation of the *Proprium Ordinis praedicatorum*,
- to inform the Order on important official news regarding liturgy,
- to inform those responsible for liturgy at the provinces on issues relating to the liturgical patrimony of the Order.
- to maintain contact with brothers and sisters in charge of initial and ongoing formation at the provinces with regards to the liturgical life,
- to help prepare for the Jubilee of the Order through the publication of significant texts,
- to promote scientific research on liturgy within the Order.

In line with this mandate, to resume the publication of Infocliop, the bulletin created by the previous Liturgical Commission, hoping that it will be dedicated to one of the main pillars of our Dominican Life - Preaching. According to the Master of the Order at the last meeting of the Commission, our celebrations are public because of the preaching and it demands from the community, the joy of receiving.

Therefore, in this issue of Infocliop, we publish four articles of our brothers to whom we are grateful for their cooperation.

- The first article is by fr David Caron, OP of the Province of St Martin de Porres, USA and member of the CLIOP and the title is, “Happiness is an Internal Joy with External Implications”.
- The second article is by fr Paul Philibert, OP, theologian and Promoter of Ongoing Formation in the Province of St Martin de Porres, USA and the title is, “Preach the Joy of the Gospel: Dominican Thoughts on *Evangelii Gaudium*”.
- The third article is by fr Jorge Presmanes, OP, D. Min, of the Province of St Martin de Porres, USA and the title is: “Preaching as a Dialogue between Faith and Culture: a Spanish-American Perspective”.
- The fourth article is by Sr Mary Frances Fleischaker, OP, D. Min, of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan, USA and it is titled, “Liturgical Catechesis and the Arts: A Pastoral Response to *Evangelii Gaudium*”.



We hope that reading these articles will help us reach a deeper understanding of our preaching and may St Magdalene, the first preacher help the whole Dominican family to live and preach the gospel of grace that Christ has entrusted to us.

Click here for a copy of the Infocliop January 2015:

www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier/infocliop-01-2015-en.pdf

fr. José Filipe da Costa Rodrigues, O.P.

• **Sounds in the Silence at Museo San Marco, Florence**

In conjunction with the Dominican Jubilee 800 celebrations, Museo San Marco, Florence has kindly agreed to host members of the Dominican Family, to sing selected Dominican chants in the presence of original artworks of Beato Angelico in various locations of the museum (the Cloister, Chapter Room, Old Refectory, and Upper Corridor). The invitation is open to all members of the Dominican family; friars, nuns, sisters and laity.

If you are planning a visit to Italy, or a pilgrimage to the tomb of our Founder Saint Dominic in Bologna during the Jubilee Year, then why not also consider coming to Florence to engage first-hand with Beato Angelico's original artworks and enhance the experience by singing hymns, antiphons and responsories from the Dominican Liturgical Repertory, many of whose texts are incorporated into Angelico's paintings.

On February 20, 2015 at 16.00, 'Sounds in the Silence' will be inaugurated at Museo San Marco in Florence, with lectures by Fr. Michael Dunleavy, OP, and Dott.ssa Magnolia Scudieri, Director of the Museum. A Schola Cantorum will perform selected chants from the Dominican Repertory. The evening will conclude with a tour of the upper Dormitory and the recently restored Chapter Room.

Booking for this event, which is limited to 100 people can be made through the museum's website: museosanmarco@polomuseale.firenze.it; or by telephone, 0039 055 23 88 608.

For further information or clarification please contact:

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• **Pope Francis: "We are limited creatures, sinners ever in need of repentance and conversion"**

The Homily of the Holy Father Pope Francis at the Ash Wednesday Mass at the Basilica of Santa Sabina, 18 February 2015.

Once again, the Universal Church began the Lenten season with the celebration of Ash Wednesday. For the Church in Rome, it all began on the Aventine Hill. In accordance with tradition, Dominican and Benedictine friars with a few of the faithful gathered at the Benedictine Church of Saint Anselm in the company of Pope Francis. From there, they had a procession to the Dominican Basilica of Santa Sabina while the Litany of the Saints was being chanted. At Santa Sabina where most of the faithful were already gathered, the Pope began the Mass. In his homily, he reminded us of what the Lenten season is all about.

Here is the text of his homily:

As God's people today we begin the journey of Lent, a time in which we try to unite ourselves more closely to the Lord Jesus Christ, to share the mystery of His passion and resurrection.

The Ash Wednesday liturgy offers us, first of all, the passage from the prophet Joel, sent by God to call the people to repentance and conversion, due to a calamity (an invasion of locusts) that devastates Judea. Only the Lord can save from the scourge, and so there is need of supplication, with prayer and fasting, each confessing his sin.



The prophet insists on inner conversion: “Return to me with all your heart” (2:12). To return to the Lord “with all [one’s] heart,” means taking the path of a conversion that is neither superficial nor transient, but is a spiritual journey that reaches the deepest place of our self. The heart, in fact, is the seat of our sentiments, the center in which our decisions and our attitudes mature.

That, “Return to me with all your heart,” does not involve only individuals, but extends to the community, is a summons addressed to all: “Gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. (2:16)”

The prophet dwells particularly on the prayers of priests, noting that their prayer should be accompanied by tears. We will do well to ask, at the beginning of this Lent, for the gift of tears, so as to make our prayer and our journey of conversion ever more authentic and without hypocrisy.

This is precisely the message of today’s Gospel. In the passage from Matthew, Jesus rereads the three works of mercy prescribed by the Mosaic law: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Over time, these prescriptions had been scored by the rust of external formalism, or even mutated into a sign of social superiority. Jesus highlights a common temptation in these three works, which can be described summarily as hypocrisy (He names it as such three times): “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them ... Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do ... And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men ... And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites. (Mt 6:1, 2, 5, 16)”

When you do something good, almost instinctively born in us is the desire to be respected and admired for this good deed, to obtain a satisfaction. Jesus invites us to do these works without any ostentation, and to trust only in the reward of the Father “who sees in secret” (Mt 6,4.6.18).

Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord never ceases to have mercy on us, and desires to offer us His forgiveness yet again, inviting us to return to Him with a new heart, purified from evil, to take part in His joy. How to accept this invitation? St. Paul makes a suggestion to us in the second reading today: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20)” This work of conversion is not just a human endeavor. Reconciliation between us and God is possible thanks to the mercy of the Father who, out of love for us, did not hesitate to sacrifice his only Son. In fact, the Christ, who was righteous and without sin was made sin for us (v. 21) when on the cross He was burdened with our sins, and so redeemed us and justified before God. In Him we can become righteous, in him we can change, if we accept the grace of God and do not let the “acceptable time (6:2)” pass in vain.

With this awareness, trusting and joyful, let us begin our Lenten journey. May Mary Immaculate sustain our spiritual battle against sin, accompany us in this acceptable time, so that we might come together to sing the exultation of victory in Easter.

Soon we will make the gesture of the imposition of ashes on the head. The celebrant says these words: “You are dust and to dust you shall return, (cf. Gen 3:19)” or repeats Jesus’ exhortation: “Repent and believe the gospel. (Mk 1:15)” Both formulae are a reminder of the truth of human existence: we are limited creatures, sinners ever in need of repentance and conversion. How important is it to listen and to welcome this reminder in our time! The call to conversion is then a push to return, as did the son of the parable, to the arms of God, tender and merciful Father, to trust Him and to entrust ourselves to Him.

• [The Intentions of the Dominican Order as they welcome Pope Francis at Santa Sabina](#)

Fr Vivian Boland, OP speaks to the Vatican Radio

Pope Francis will celebrate Mass for Ash Wednesday at the Basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome, marking the beginning of the season of Lent. Santa Sabina is the first of the traditional Lenten Station churches. Since the beginning of the thirteenth century, the church of Santa Sabina has been entrusted to the Dominican Order.



“We’re always very pleased that the Pope comes to Santa Sabina on Ash Wednesday, that Lent begins here for the Church,” said Father Vivian Boland, OP, a friar of the Irish Province. Father Boland is currently assigned to Santa Sabina, where he is the Vicar to the Master of the Order.

Speaking with Vatican Radio, Father Boland spoke about some of the intentions the Dominican brothers will have for the Mass with Pope Francis. Listen:

Intentions

Father Boland said the community at Santa Sabina will be praying especially for “our Dominican brothers and sisters in situations of great difficulty.” He mentioned especially the Dominican family in Iraq, who “are enduring an ongoing Lent, they’re having a very difficult time. And we have them especially in our minds this Ash Wednesday.” Fr Boland also spoke about the Dominicans in Ukraine, in the Central African Republic, and in “other parts of the world where there’s violence and war.”

The Dominicans are also preparing for the 800th anniversary of the foundation of their Order, which was approved in 1216 by Pope Honorius II. Father Boland said the jubilee is “a time for renewal, for us to reflect on our lives, and to try to be humble, be truthful, and dedicate ourselves again to the mission of St. Dominic.”

Finally, Fr Boland noted that the Leonine Commission, established by Pope Leo XIII in 1880 to produce critical editions of the works of St Thomas Aquinas, has published a new volume containing the sermons of St Thomas. “We treasure these sermons of St Thomas,” Fr Boland said, “because they also give us another insight into his personality, into what he was like as a person, even more than his philosophical and theological writings do.” Fr Boland said the Dominicans hope to present that volume to the Pope when he comes to Santa Sabina.

From the Vatican Radio

● [“Make your hearts firm” \(Jas 5:8\): MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2015](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each communities and every believer. Above all it is a “time of grace” (2 Cor 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. “We love because he first has loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. He is interested in each of us; his love does not allow him to be indifferent to what happens to us. Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure... Our heart grows cold. As long as I am relatively healthy and comfortable, I don’t think about those less well off. Today, this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalization of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.

When the people of God are converted to his love, they find answers to the questions that history continually raises. One of the most urgent challenges which I would like to address in this Message is precisely the globalization of indifference.

Indifference to our neighbour and to God also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience.

God is not indifferent to our world; he so loves it that he gave his Son for our salvation. In the Incarnation, in the earthly life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, the gate between God and man, between heaven and earth, opens once for all. The Church is like the hand holding open this gate, thanks to her proclamation of God’s word, her celebration of the sacraments and her witness of the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5:6). But the world tends to withdraw into itself and shut that door through which God comes into the world and the world comes to him. Hence the hand, which is the Church, must never be surprised if it is rejected, crushed and wounded.



God's people, then, need this interior renewal, lest we become indifferent and withdraw into ourselves. To further this renewal, I would like to propose for our reflection three biblical texts.

1. "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Cor 12:26) – The Church

The love of God breaks through that fatal withdrawal into ourselves which is indifference. The Church offers us this love of God by her teaching and especially by her witness. But we can only bear witness to what we ourselves have experienced. Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy, with Christ, so as to become, like Christ, servants of God and others. This is clearly seen in the liturgy of Holy Thursday, with its rite of the washing of feet. Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, but he came to realize that Jesus does not wish to be just an example of how we should wash one another's feet. Only those who have first allowed Jesus to wash their own feet can then offer this service to others. Only they have "a part" with him (Jn 13:8) and thus can serve others.

Lent is a favourable time for letting Christ serve us so that we in turn may become more like him. This happens whenever we hear the word of God and receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. There we become what we receive: the Body of Christ. In this body there is no room for the indifference which so often seems to possess our hearts. For whoever is of Christ, belongs to one body, and in him we cannot be indifferent to one another. "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor 12:26).

The Church is the *communio sanctorum* not only because of her saints, but also because she is a communion in holy things: the love of God revealed to us in Christ and all his gifts. Among these gifts there is also the response of those who let themselves be touched by this love. In this communion of saints, in this sharing in holy things, no one possesses anything alone, but shares everything with others. And since we are united in God, we can do something for those who are far distant, those whom we could never reach on our own, because with them and for them, we ask God that all of us may be open to his plan of salvation.

2. "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9) – Parishes and Communities

All that we have been saying about the universal Church must now be applied to the life of our parishes and communities. Do these ecclesial structures enable us to experience being part of one body? A body which receives and shares what God wishes to give? A body which acknowledges and cares for its weakest, poorest and most insignificant members? Or do we take refuge in a universal love that would embrace the whole world, while failing to see the Lazarus sitting before our closed doors (Lk 16:19-31)?

In order to receive what God gives us and to make it bear abundant fruit, we need to press beyond the boundaries of the visible Church in two ways.

In the first place, by uniting ourselves in prayer with the Church in heaven. The prayers of the Church on earth establish a communion of mutual service and goodness which reaches up into the sight of God. Together with the saints who have found their fulfilment in God, we form part of that communion in which indifference is conquered by love. The Church in heaven is not triumphant because she has turned her back on the sufferings of the world and rejoices in splendid isolation. Rather, the saints already joyfully contemplate the fact that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, they have triumphed once and for all over indifference, hardness of heart and hatred. Until this victory of love penetrates the whole world, the saints continue to accompany us on our pilgrim way. Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Doctor of the Church, expressed her conviction that the joy in heaven for the victory of crucified love remains incomplete as long as there is still a single man or woman on earth who suffers and cries out in pain: "I trust fully that I shall not remain idle in heaven; my desire is to continue to work for the Church and for souls" (Letter 254, July 14, 1897).

We share in the merits and joy of the saints, even as they share in our struggles and our longing for peace and reconciliation. Their joy in the victory of the Risen Christ gives us strength as we strive to overcome our indifference and hardness of heart.

In the second place, every Christian community is called to go out of itself and to be engaged in the life of the greater society of which it is a part, especially with the poor and those who are far away. The Church is missionary by her very nature; she is not self-enclosed but sent out to every nation and people.



Her mission is to bear patient witness to the One who desires to draw all creation and every man and woman to the Father. Her mission is to bring to all a love which cannot remain silent. The Church follows Jesus Christ along the paths that lead to every man and woman, to the very ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). In each of our neighbours, then, we must see a brother or sister for whom Christ died and rose again. What we ourselves have received, we have received for them as well. Similarly, all that our brothers and sisters possess is a gift for the Church and for all humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, how greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference!

3. “Make your hearts firm!” (James 5:8) – Individual Christians

As individuals too, we have are tempted by indifference. Flooded with news reports and troubling images of human suffering, we often feel our complete inability to help. What can we do to avoid being caught up in this spiral of distress and powerlessness?

First, we can pray in communion with the Church on earth and in heaven. Let us not underestimate the power of so many voices united in prayer! The 24 Hours for the Lord initiative, which I hope will be observed on 13-14 March throughout the Church, also at the diocesan level, is meant to be a sign of this need for prayer.

Second, we can help by acts of charity, reaching out to both those near and far through the Church’s many charitable organizations. Lent is a favourable time for showing this concern for others by small yet concrete signs of our belonging to the one human family.

Third, the suffering of others is a call to conversion, since their need reminds me of the uncertainty of my own life and my dependence on God and my brothers and sisters. If we humbly implore God’s grace and accept our own limitations, we will trust in the infinite possibilities which God’s love holds out to us. We will also be able to resist the diabolical temptation of thinking that by our own efforts we can save the world and ourselves.

As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31). A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.

During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: “*Fac cor nostrum secundum cor tuum*”: Make our hearts like yours (Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.

It is my prayerful hope that this Lent will prove spiritually fruitful for each believer and every ecclesial community. I ask all of you to pray for me. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you.

Francis - From the Vatican, 4 October 2014 (Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi)

• [Why does the Lenten Season begin on the Aventine Hill?](#)

The Roman Church begins its celebration of Lent each year in the Basilica of St. Sabina on the Aventine Hill. The fact that this season starts here and that the sprinkling of ashes happens in a Dominican Church is more than a simple coincidence.

One of the paradoxes of history is that when the Dominicans received from Pope Honorius III the Basilica of St. Sabina in Rome during the thirteenth century, probably the tradition of Station Masses was no longer in use. Yet eight hundred years later it is in now in their church that the Pope receives the ashes. I am convinced that this is no mere accident. With this powerful sign of our desire to do Penance, a way of life begins each



year: not only for the Order of Preachers, but for the whole Church. Together we make a common journey towards the Risen Christ. It is only in this perspective of a shared life, where we direct our attention to the spiritual and human needs of others, that our concern about prayer, fasting, and asceticism makes any sense...

Let us examine the “secret” manuscripts

Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to look into the oldest liturgical books known to us – and I do not mean the “Tridentine Missal”, which perhaps comes first to our minds – knows how exciting these texts can be in helping us to make a pilgrimage to medieval Rome. In them are detailed comments and passing observations that we can easily overlook as we focus our attention on lofty ideas.

For Ash Wednesday there is a version of the Gregorian Sacramentary, located in the Vatican Library. This liturgical book or, “codex,” contains liturgical usages, such as those practiced in eighth century Rome. On one of the folios of this text are written the prayer, in black, and in red, the following interesting annotations: *Feria III Ad sanctam Anastasiam* (f. 28r, the second line from the bottom in red) and *Ad Sanctam Sabinam* (f. 28v, the fourth line from the top, also in red). Let us open the book and see for ourselves.

It is worth taking the time to examine the parchment cards, because also, like the rest of the book, is truly revelatory. When the text refers to *Feria III*, this is Wednesday. Moreover, *Sancta Anastasia* and *Sancta Sabina* are both very near to each other. The rubrics, or the information in red, say that the following prayer should be said in the Basilica of St. Anastasia (still in use for the blessing of ashes in the current Missal):

*Concede nobis, Domine,
praesidia militiae christianae sanctis inchoare ieiuniis,
ut contra spirituales nequitiae pugnaturi,
continentiae muniamur auxiliis.*

*Grant, O Lord,
that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of the Christian service,
so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils,
we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.*

And, in the Basilica of St. Sabina:
*Praesta, Domine, fidelibus tuis,
ut ieiuniorum veneranda sollemnia
et congrua pietate suscipiant
et securo devotione percurrant.*

We are looking in the part of the manuscript, which describes the preparation for Easter. Therefore we can say that in these two churches in Rome is where the celebration of Lent began each year.

Why should the Pope not stay at home?

At this point we may wish to ask the question, why go back to such a tradition? In the liturgical renewal, St. John XXIII (in the first year of his Pontificate) clearly wished to restore the earlier practice, but with a slight variation: the procession begins now, not in the Basilica of St. Anastasia, but in the Basilica of St. Anselm. Yet we may still ask ourselves, why should the Pope come from the Vatican to the Aventine Hill, to participate in a procession from the Basilica of the Benedictines to that of the Dominicans? Perhaps there is more at work than the preservation of a beautiful tradition.

The beginning of Lent reminds us that fasting is a matter for the entire Church, which then gathers together to celebrate the Eucharist. The discipline of Lent is not to encourage individual training, like going to the gym to acquire a strong body. Asceticism and penance is the task of the entire Church!

How do we translate, however, lofty theological statements into everyday practices? First of all, we have to look at ourselves and see our Lenten pilgrimage toward the Risen Lord challenges us to, not simply what disturbs our “ego”, but what unsettles us as a people. Christianity is not about our becoming isolated, perfect individuals. Perhaps, there is someone who is very close to you, who is carrying a heavy burden in his life.



How can you help him? By our fasting, prayer and charity we become “sober” and able to re-envision and re-understand the real world, not the artificial one that we have created.

The fact that the Pope begins Lent in the Church of the Preachers is no coincidence. If the life of the Dominicans is as truly apostolic as their Constitutions insist, with its focus upon preaching and the salvation of souls, there can be no better place for Lent to start.

Dominik Jurczak, OP

• [An Introduction to the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers by Mark de Caluwe OP](#)

In 1999 the Province of St. Joseph the Worker in Nigeria published An Introduction to the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers as a course for novice-masters and novices in our Order. A Spanish translation was made and published in 2000-01 by fr Francisco Javier Rodriguez in Seville.

Since that time the General Chapters have made several changes in our Constitutions, not only in the structure of the Order, e.g. by no longer accepting the existence of general vicariates or regional vicariates, but also for other elements of our life. Hence it was obvious that this Course needed to be updated.

An opportunity to do this came with the request to fr Mark, from the Masters of Novices of France, for a French translation. So the text of 2000 was revised in 2014. fr Mark was also able to prepare a new edition in English. This means that at the moment a revised text is available in two languages, English and French.

This revised edition has not been published but is available in electronic form. fr Mark is happy to send it to any brother who is interested and who wishes to receive a copy. Just email him at mark.decaluwe@telenet.be

• [Blessed Jordan and the Dominican Nuns](#)

Before St. Dominic had any substantial following of men, he had already founded a monastery of nuns. The historical reasons are simple enough to understand. After saving a number of women from the heresy of the Cathars, he needed to offer them a positive alternative. As Cathars, these women lived very austere, ascetical lives. As Catholics, Dominic offered them an opportunity to be true ascetics by founding a monastery at Prouille. Dominic would later refound St. Sixtus convent in Rome. In Bologna, he received the vows of a young woman, Diana d’Andalò, a daughter of a noble family. Sadly, St. Dominic would die before Diana was ever able to enter a Dominican monastery.

Blessed Jordan, as Master of the Order, continued St. Dominic’s work. As Master of the Order he firmly established the nuns of the Order of Preachers. In our own lives, preaching ought to come forth from the fullness of contemplation. The nuns of the Order of Preachers, living a hidden life, offer a powerful efficacy to the preached Word. Here is an example of a letter which Blessed Jordan wrote to Blessed Diana at Christmas in 1223, offering consolation, and encouraging her to contemplation of the Word:

“I cannot find the time to write you the long letter your love would wish for and I would so gladly send; nonetheless I do write, I send you a very little word, the Word made little in the crib, the Word who was made flesh for us, the Word of salvation and grace, of sweetness and glory, the Word who is good and gentle, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, Christ raised up on the Cross, raised in praise to the Father’s right hand: to whom and in whom do you raise up your soul, and find there your rest unending for ever and ever. Read over this Word in your heart, turn it over in your mind, let it be sweet as honey on your lips; ponder it, dwell on it, that it may dwell with you and in you for ever.”

As Dominic friars, we are very mindful of the great part which the nuns play in the Order of Preachers. As we continue our novena to Blessed Jordan, we ask that he obtain many vocations to the Order of Preachers, and especially to our monasteries of contemplative nuns:

Blessed Jordan of Saxony, worthy successor of St. Dominic, in the early days of the Order, your example and zeal prompted many men and women to follow Christ in the white habit of Our Holy Father. As patron of Dominican vocations, continue to stimulate talented and devoted men and women to consecrate their lives to God. Through your intercession, lead to the Order of Preachers generous and sacrificing persons, willing



to give themselves fervently to the apostolate of Truth. Help them to prepare themselves to be worthy of the grace of a Dominican vocation. Inspire their hearts to become learned of God, that with firm determination they might aspire to be “champions of the Faith and true lights of the world.”

• General Vicariate of Russia-Ukraine: From a General Vicariate to a Provincial Vicariate

Visit of fr. Bruno Cadoré, Master of the Order, and fr. Krzysztof Popławski, Socius for Central and Eastern Europe, to the Vicariate of Russia and Ukraine on February 1-5, 2015

On February 1, 2015, the Master of the Order, fr Bruno Cadoré together with fr Krzysztof Popławski, Socius for Central and Eastern Europe made a canonical visitation to the General Vicariate of Russia and Ukraine. Fr Bruno started his visitation started at the community in Lviv, while fr. Krzysztof went to Chortkiv, (both houses are located in Western Ukraine).

Four years ago, Dominicans returned to Lviv at the invitation of the Archbishop of Lviv, Most Rev Mieczysław Mokrzycki with the view to undertaking the pastoral care of the university students. The brothers in Chortkiv work in the parish which also hosts the Shrine of Our Lady and the place of martyrdom of our brothers at the hands of NKVD (Secret Service of the Soviet Police) during the World War II. It is worthy of note that a few days ago, at the end of January 2015, the town authorities returned the monastery by the church to the Dominican community in Chortkiv which until now has been an abandoned garment factory.

On February 3, 2015, fr Bruno and fr Krzysztof travelled from Lviv to our Convent in Kyiv, which is the seat of the Vicariate. The main mission of the friars in Kyiv is at St. Thomas Aquinas Institute of Religious Sciences. Fr. Paweł Kozacki, Provincial of the Polish Province, together with fr. Mirosław Sander, who is a member of the Provincial Council, also arrived in Kyiv to join the meeting.

This visit is in furtherance of the Order’s project of the restructuring of vicariates which was initiated at the General Chapter of Rome in 2010 and also reiterated at the last General Chapter in Trogir 2013. As part of this restructuring, the Vicariate of Russia and Ukraine shall become a Provincial Vicariate of the Polish Province (the territory of Ukraine) and the House beyond the borders of the Province (St. Petersburg, Russia).

In this regard, fr Bruno met the community in Kyiv and then took part in the discussions at the Vicariate Council. At present, the main focus is on the development of a memorandum which will be approved in the future. This will help to finalize the plans for the transformation of the General Vicariate into a Provincial Vicariate. According to the Master of the Order, from then onward, the Polish Province will bear responsibility for this Vicariate and also intensify efforts to enable it grow into a Vice Province.

At the moment, the General Vicariate of Russia and Ukraine consists of one Convent (Kyiv) and five houses, one of the houses is located in the territory of Russia (St. Petersburg). The status of one house in Yalta is still questionable due to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014. Hence, one brother had to leave the house and the other one keeps facing permanent difficulties with getting a Russian visa. 31 friars are currently assigned to the Vicariate.

Fr. Petro Balog OP - Secretary of the Vicariate

• Papal Visit to the University of St Thomas Aquinas, Manila

January 18, 2015, España Blvd., Manila – Tens of thousands of people gathered around the University of Santo Tomas for the much anticipated Papal Visit. Lines began to form at the various gates of UST on the night of January 17 with families camping out wherever they could.

An early morning Mass was held at six in the morning presided by Br. Rolando dela Rosa, OP, since Pope Francis would not celebrate Mass at the University. The excitement continued to grow and was undaunted by the rainy weather as the time for the Pope’s arrival drew near.

Around 9:30 in the morning, the crowds around UST erupted in cheers as they caught sight of the Pope mobile. Upon his arrival at the University, Pope Francis first made an iconic passage through the Arch of the



Centuries and signed in the University's guestbook. He then rode around the campus, cheerfully waving to everyone who had braved the crowds and the weather to have a glimpse of Christ's Vicar on earth.

Everything grew quiet however once the program started. Four youths (two students and two from the Tulay ng Kabataan Foundation) Jun Chura, Leandro Santos II, Rikki Q. Macolor, and Glyzelle Palomar each shared their messages and questions for Pope Francis.

It was a memorable event when Glyzelle, a twelve-year old former street child, broke down into tears after asking the question, "Why does God allow children to suffer?" The crowd was all ears as Pope Francis gave his response with Glyzelle's question getting a silent hug of sympathy as response.

Pope Francis set aside his prepared speech to be able to respond from the heart. He urged the youth not to be afraid of crying, that crying allows a person to view things in a different perspective. In response to today's technology and ease of information, he used the metaphor of a museum as something which the youth must avoid. He gave the youth a very powerful message namely that one must Think Well, Feel Well, and Do Well.

Towards the end of his speech, Pope Francis told the crowd to learn how to beg in order to grow in their commitment to help others. It was a memorable message for all those gathered at UST and everyone strove to get a last glimpse of the Pope as he departed for Luneta for his afternoon Mass there.

Viva il Papa!

By Br. Jose Laureano de Jesus, OP

• JOINT MEETING BETWEEN THE PROVINCIALS/VICARS AND THE REGENTS OF STUDIES FROM THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

Act 95 of the General Chapter of Diffinitors in Trogir, Croatia (2013) commissions all the Regents of Studies and the superiors of Provinces and Vicariates in each region to meet together at least once before the General Chapter of 2016 in order to study and implement possible kinds of concrete collaboration needed in the region.

For this reason, the following brothers met:

Br. Michael Mascari, OP - Socius for Intellectual Life;

Br. Vincent Lu Vien Ha, OP - Socius for Asia Pacific Region;

Br. Joseph Ngo Si Dinh, OP - Prior Provincial, Reginae Martyrum, Vietnam;

Br. Nguyen Truong Tam, OP - Regent of Studies, Reginae Martyrum, Vietnam;

Br. Kevin Saunders, OP - Prior Provincial, Assumption Province, Australia/New Zealand;

Br. Mark O'Brien, OP - Regent of Studies, Assumption Province, Australia/ New Zealand;

Br. Gerard Francisco Timoner III, OP - Prior Provincial, Philippines;

Br. Romulo Rodriguez, OP - Regent of Studies, Philippines;

Br. Javier Gonzales, OP - Prior Provincial, Our Lady of the Rosary Province;

Br. Kim Sang Tae, OP - Regent of Studies, Our Lady of the Rosary Province;

Br. Vincent Li, OP - Vicar General, Vicariatus Generalis Reginae Sinae (General Vicariate of Taiwan);

Br. Philip Pan, OP - Regent of Studies, Vicariatus Generalis Reginae Sinae;

Br. James Channan OP - Regent of Studies, Vice-Provincia Filius Mariae, Pakistan;

Br. John Kusumalayam, OP - Prior Provincial, India;

Br. George Kumblumoottil, OP - Regent of Studies, India;

Br. Mariano Gonzalez Martin, OP, - Regional Prior, Regional Vicariate of Our Lady of the Rosary in Japan;

Br. Paul Ihara, OP - Regional Prior, Regional Vicariate of the Province of St. Dominic (Canada) in Japan.

The first-ever joint meeting was held at the Foyer De Charite Cao Thai in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam from the 2nd to the 6th of February 2015. The said activity was also graced by the sharing of Br. Michael Deeb, OP, the Promoter for Justice and Peace in the Order. There was a fruitful exchange that brought about a number of resolutions from the body such as: the exchange of professors from the academic centers, identification of 4 brethren from the Asia Pacific region who will specialize on Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism and whose scholarship will be from the Region, production of resources and manuals that would



help the brothers doing their ministry in their inter-faith contexts and the inclusion of a module on inter-faith dialogue in the Annual Common Study in the Region.

In addition to the Joint Meeting, the Provincials/Vicars and the Regent of Studies also had their separate sessions for their peculiar agendas.

We thank the Province of Reginae Martyrum of Vietnam for their remarkable hospitality and may our Father St. Dominic guide us in our ministry!

By Br. Romulo Rodriguez, OP

• **THE FIRST PROFESSION OF THE DOMINICAN LAITY IN SURABAYA, INDONESIA**

On Feb. 01 2015, twenty five Dominican laity members made their first profession to the Order of Preachers in the presence of Br. Arthur Dingel, OP, the superior of the community of St. Thomas Aquinas, Surabaya. Br. Cecilio Vladimir Magboo, OP also came as a witness to such a momentous event, as well as to represent the coordinator of the Dominican Laity in Manila. Br. Nilo Lardizabal, OP, the coordinator of the Dominican Laity of Surabaya officiated at the mass which was a regular afternoon mass at the parish.

The Eucharistic Celebration was held on the 4th Sunday of ordinary time; Br. Nilo's homily mentioned that their promises, as well as the scapular, are reminders that they are continually on their way to discover and thus love the Dominican way of life. He added that these are not merely for exclusive display on their bodies but for the sake of preaching the Word of God. At the end of the mass, Mrs. Josephine, the lay OP coordinator encouraged all the people present to join the Order and pray for them.

In addition, before the final blessing, Br. Arthur, OP also gave his felicitations and message to welcome the newly professed lay Dominicans. We ask God to continually strengthen and inspire them in order to fully realize the spirit and charism of Saint Dominic as the true preacher, so that we can grow up together in the Dominican spirituality truthfully.

Br. Agustinus Hermawan, OP

• **Bearing witness, being church: Dominican sisters in Iraq**

Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq

In the middle of makeshift refugee camps, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena are trying to make life work.

They get up every morning for prayer, and then they spend the rest of the day visiting the thousands of Iraqi refugees living in the abandoned malls and unfinished construction sites of Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. The sisters would like to open schools for the children, but for now they're making do with a Montessori kindergarten that's run out of an apartment.

As the sisters move about the camps, people clamor to touch them. After all, they have become the visible church for deeply spiritual people who have lost everything – at least that's how Jersey City-based Dominican Sr. Arlene Flaherty sees it. Flaherty visited the camps last month as part of a three-woman delegation of U.S. Dominicans, evidence of a transnational relationship forged almost two decades ago in the aftermath during the Gulf War.

The Iraqi sisters have endured a lot. The first Iraqi nationals joined the community in 1877, and theirs is the first congregation of Catholic women religious in modern Iraq. They've stayed committed to their homeland throughout its embattled history, refusing to leave Iraq during the Gulf War in 1990 and again during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Even when a missile hit and damaged their motherhouse in 2003, they stayed. The sisters intended to outlast ISIS, too, but like tens of thousands of others, they were ultimately forced to flee north to Iraqi Kurdistan.

ISIS came seemingly from nowhere, but of course that wasn't really the case. Everyone comes from somewhere, and the Islamist terrorist group suddenly dominating last summer's headlines – we would later learn – had sprung from the ravaged, sectarian soil of post-invasion Iraq.



Highly organized, well-armed and well-funded, ISIS introduced itself to most of the world in June 2014 via a series of high-profile attacks – first violently seizing control of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, and then capturing nearby Qaraqosh, where many of Mosul’s refugees had fled. Christians, who were plentiful in both cities, were told to leave, convert or die, and gruesome tales of Christians being raped and beheaded began to populate the Internet.

Although they got most of the international attention, Christians weren’t the only targets. Religious and ethnic minorities of all kinds were singled out as ISIS – also known as ISIL, Daesh or the Islamic State – blazed a bloody path to international notoriety. What they wanted, the militants said, was to establish their version of an Islamic state – a caliphate – in Iraq, which would tolerate no Christians, no Yazidis and no Shiite Muslims, save those women and girls forcibly converted and sold as sex slaves.

By the end of 2014 ISIS would have its self-proclaimed caliphate, and it would control what the Wall Street Journal estimated was a Belgium-sized chunk of Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, Iraq’s historically Christian regions have been depleted and some defense experts have admitted they aren’t sure how to handle ISIS’s particular brand of terror.

The Christian refugees aren’t safe in northern Iraq. Just during the nine days the U.S. delegation was there, Flaherty said ISIS made two attempts to move into Erbil. But even if ISIS weren’t close by, the living conditions in the camps are threat enough. Refugees who don’t live in the malls or construction sites live in cramped, uninsulated aluminum boxes. Access to water is spotty, and heat for the chilly northern nights is rare.

“The situation in Kurdistan is temporary with a capital ‘T’ and unsafe with a capital ‘U,’” said Sr. Dusty Farnan, a Dominican sister from Adrian, Michigan, who was part of the delegation with Flaherty. “The overall feeling is one of severe depression and profound loss. One of the sisters said, ‘When I look at the people, it’s not the same faces anymore.’ So it’s profound, profound sadness.”

Flaherty concurs, stating that in her 30 years of working with refugees, the conditions in Erbil are the worst she’s ever seen.

“I’ve seen some things in my life, believe me,” she said in a Skype conversation while she was still in the region. “I’ve lived in the Caribbean, I was in Haiti, I have been and Syria and Damascus looking at other refugee situations, and I have never seen anything like this. I am blown away.”

Flaherty says she doesn’t cry easily, but she was moved to tears in Erbil – not just because of what she witnessed in the camps, but also because of what she sees as her country’s past and present collusion in creating the political atmosphere that created the current situation. ISIS may have finally driven the Christians out of their homes, she said, but 2014 wasn’t the start of their suffering.

The 2003 invasion decimated Iraqi infrastructure and services, many of which have not been adequately repaired. Even the Iraqi Dominicans, who used to run schools, hospitals and orphanages in and around Mosul, were forced to close most of their institutions when the Iraq War began. Furthermore, when Saddam Hussein’s regime was toppled, it created a power vacuum that was left largely unchecked, launching a civil war and allowing for al-Qaida – the group where ISIS has its genesis – to gain a foothold in Iraq for the first time.

“It’s been a series of losses for the Iraqi people – and for the Christian people in Iraq – since the war began,” Flaherty said. “The disruption of life there, the chaos in the region, the upending of this society – we have a relationship to that, so do we not have a responsibility here?”

That sense of relationship to and responsibility for Iraq runs deep in the U.S. Dominicans. They met their Iraqi sisters for the first time in 1999 – back when there was a United Nations-imposed travel ban on Iraq.



“Only sisters and brothers, you know, can take these risks,” Farnan said of that first trip, “and these things are not without consequences. But it seems to me, the biggest consequence was the solidarity of knowing that you’re sister and brother with your family in Iraq.”

That same year, Dominicans in the U.S. and Canada launched the Iraq Coordinating Committee, a joint-effort of the Dominican Leadership Conference and the North American Promoters of Justice, Peace and Care of Creation. The committee advocated for peace and humanitarian aid as economic sanctions slowly crushed the Iraqi people and as war forced the Iraqi sisters to close almost all of the schools and hospitals they had run since 1877.

The committee disbanded in 2008, when President George W. Bush signed an agreement setting an end-date for U.S. troop presence in Iraq, but was reinstated this summer as Iraqi sisters began sending updates to sisters in the U.S. about ISIS.

“In June, I was on a retreat, and I started getting these texts that they had to leave,” said Farnan, who chaired the Iraq Coordinating Committee from 2002 to 2008. “They didn’t know for how long – and in June it was only for three days, and then they returned.”

But as the months progressed and the situation worsened, the resurrected Iraq Coordinating Committee decided to send a delegation to Erbil in January to visit the sisters and the other refugees. They were hearing a lot in the U.S., Farnan said, but they weren’t seeing anything. So three sisters went: Farnan, Flaherty and Marcelline Koch, who is currently the North American co-promoter of justice and peace for Dominican Sisters International.

They spent nine days in Iraqi Kurdistan and Jordan, helping the Iraqi sisters with their ministries and gathering information for their peace advocacy work back at home. They were in Erbil when a gunman allegedly claiming sympathies with ISIS took hostages in a kosher market in Paris. The attack didn’t go unnoticed in Erbil.

“The sisters were saying it’s so insane how extensive the reach of this organization is and how its m.o. in the world is to terrorize,” Flaherty said. “They are able to go from one community to another and say, ‘We can terrorize you. We can scare the hell out of you if we want to.’ And sometimes, just that strategy – that threat alone – is even psychologically much more powerful than the presence of somebody with a gun in front of you.”

But the Iraqi sisters are carrying on, Flaherty said, doing whatever they can to provide spiritual and physical comfort for the other refugees, though it’s difficult given the conditions.

“These are women who are committed to helping to shape their culture and their community, helping to contribute to Iraq by educating Iraqi children,” she said. “They don’t just educate Catholic children, they educate Muslims and Christians. And they’ve done that throughout their whole lives, and they’re some of the best educators in this country. Now they’re in a situation where they have the skill, the experience, the licensing, everything that they need – and for the first time in their lives, they can’t give it. And they see the need.”

Recently, Flaherty said, the U.S. consulate in Iraq told the sisters they would need to raise funds through private donors if they wanted to get anything done in the refugee camps. The Iraqi government hasn’t provided support for the refugees, the Kurdish government either can’t or won’t and the United States has yet to grant them actual refugee status.

It’s a desperate and oppressive situation, Farnan said, but it isn’t without a glimmer of hope.

“I’ve never seen such incredibly deep faith,” she said of the refugees. “I think they have some kind of DNA cell that just says, ‘When all else fails, my faith will be there.’”



They pack hundreds-deep into the malls every Sunday for Mass, singing without hymnals because they know every word by heart. Farnan said that even in their makeshift homes, they display religious pictures and icons.

“There’s no way of separating them from their faith,” she said, “and that is what gives them some hope.”
By Dawn Cherie Araujo, staff reporter for Global Sisters Report, based in Kansas City.

Official News

• [Fr Thomas Gabriel Brogl is the New Provincial of the Province of St Albert the Great, Southern Germany and Austria](#)

The Master of the Order has confirmed the election of Fr Thomas Gabriel Brogl as the new Prior Provincial of the Province of St Albert the Great in Southern Germany and Austria.

He was born in Donauwörth, Bavaria in 1977. He made his first profession in 2004 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2008. He studied “Theology of Spirituality” after his ordination. He has worked at the Pastor of St Martin in Town Hall Square, Fribourg.

In his province, he has been the Master of Students and the syndic of their convent in Vienna. He has also worked with the Dominican laity in his province.

Calendar of the Master of the Order for March 2015

7-10: Visitation to Belarus

17-19: At the New Provincial Workshop in Santa Sabina, Rome

23-25: Visitation to the Angelicum

31 March-8 April: Visitation to the Central African Republic

All articles are available on www.op.org