Letter to the brothers of the Order of Preachers: From the “Propositum” of the Order to the conventual project of apostolic life

My dear brothers,

It is in the perspective of this «propositum» of the Order that I address to you this letter devoted to the «community project», thus responding to the request of the general chapter of Trogir (ACG Trogir 2013, 69). I propose to highlight how the work of each community in elaborating its «program or project of apostolic life» (LCO 311, § II) actually opens a path on which each brother and each community is engaged in the unending process of «confirmation» of the Order through the deployment of its fundamental «propositum» (LCO 1, § I; § VIII).

By stating that: «The Order’s nature as a religious society derives from its mission and its fraternal communion» (LCO 1, § VI), the Fundamental Constitution clearly establishes the link between mission and community that defines our Order. In doing so, it refers to one of the essential tasks of the conventual chapter: to examine at the same time the fidelity of brothers to the apostolic mission and to the regular life (LCO 7 § II). In fact, a reflection on the conventual project of apostolic life is also an invitation to consider the responsibility of the chapter in the dynamics of the «holy preaching».

Conventual apostolic project and Propositum of the Order

It was the General Chapter of Oakland that introduced the term «community project» and since then the chapters of the Order have expressed themselves several times on this theme’. Certainly, we can note that the chapter intended to face the difficulties encountered, here or there, in ensuring that the life of a community is not reduced simply to a juxtaposition of individual activities carried out without any link with the community (cf ACG Oakland, 1989, 38). In this way also it clearly highlighted the risk of «excessive individualism» in communities (moreover, in this respect, it is useful to underline that this trend did not emerge only with the arrival of the «new generations», even if we can recognize among them a
specific form of relation of the individual to the group, as well as a specific process of recognition and identification of personal journeys within a collective history). But, over and above that reason, talk of the community project seeks also to promote apostolic work in common (ACG Calerueba 1995, 44). That is why the chapter of Bogotà affirms that the community project is an instrument for making positive the tension between fraternal life and mission (Mexico City 39; Calerueba 44; Bologna 127-132), in order to ensure that it is the whole community that preaches and bears witness (LCO 311 §II). This project «is an instrument for deepening our relationships, strengthening sincere communication and the commitment of all to the mission» (ACG Bogotà 2007, 164). It is in this way that the conventual communities become «houses of preaching» (ACG Krakow 2004, 219-226). The call to develop the apostolic plan of a community is a call to implement the capitular modality of fraternal communion and to find in it one of the key sources of the mission of preaching.

A debated expression

Many of the brothers nonetheless, in all parts of the world, express perplexity as to the relevance of this notion of community project. In the first place these are objections in the linguistic order because, depending on language and culture, to speak of a «project» may indicate realities as diverse as a program of concrete objectives to be attained, an overall plan of life, or even an ideological project. Some fear also a univocal definition of the activity that must absolutely be accepted and implemented by all who want to belong to a community and engage in it. Others will argue that the «common project» in the Order is already clearly established by the Constitutions and the Acts of the general and provincial chapters and that it is not necessary to add more. Others express the fear that such a «common» project might suffocate individual creativity, or neglect the value of subsidiarity (since it is to be approved by the prior provincial). It is therefore important to avoid what the brothers fear, that it would impede the proper deployment of the vocation of the Order.

However, beyond these perplexities and objections, it is important to realize that precisely with this concept, successive general Chapters wanted to call the brothers to bind themselves to what is the very heart of the vocation of Order: to offer to the Church and to the world «houses of preaching» where brothers learn to «remain in the Word» in order to «become disciples» (cf. Jn 8, 31-32; Jn 14, 23; Mt 11, 29). In preparing the project of the community, and in evaluating it regularly, the conventual chapter assumes its proper responsibility of governing the «holy preaching». In doing so, it expresses a conviction (perhaps this is what gave rise to the fact that the chapter of Trogir, noting the perplexity of some about the use of this concept, asked the Master of the Order to write a letter on this matter!): the concrete realization of fraternal communion is an integral part of the preaching of the Order. And this belief challenges us: how can the brothers subsume an undeniable tendency to individualism – or rather, I think, to a privatization of preaching – in a common aspiration to receive their vocation again and again from the «fraternal communion of preachers» to which they are assigned? The issue is the esteem that each one has for the «crucible of community life» as the source of the ministry of preaching, by recognizing it as the source of his own personal life, human, Christian, spiritual, religious, apostolic and Dominican. We can therefore actually speak of a «project of fraternity» of a fraternity in which each one wishes to be engendered anew every day, a fraternal life that is in itself a «preaching» of the promise of communion. A fraternal life that will be a sign in the world, to the extent that it is preaching for its members. Fraternal communion and mission!

A «project» to confirm the «Propositum» of Dominic

The word Propositum is the one with which the Fundamental Constitution of the Order begins (LCO 1, §I) and the different translations give us an orientation to clarify what is at stake in the «community project». «Propositum Ordinis his exprimebat verbis Honorius papa III s. Dominico et fratibus eius scribens». The English translation begins like this: «The Order’s purpose was described as follows by Pope Honorius III in a letter to St Dominic and his brothers: ‘He who never ceases to make his church fruitful through new offspring wishes to make these modern times the equal of former days and to spread the Catholic faith. So he inspired you with a holy desire to embrace poverty, profess the regular life and commit yourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching everywhere the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ [Bull of 18 January 1221]». This first word is translated in Spanish by «el ideal de la Orden» (the ideal), and in French by «le projet de l’Ordre» (project, purpose). So the Propositum of Dominic is the project of the Order, its ideal aim, its finality. How can we help to ensure that the program or project of apostolic life (programma
**seu schema vitae apostolicae; programma o proyecto; programme ou projet** of a community is the interpretation, for a particular time and place, of the *propositum* of the beginnings? This, it seems to me, is the challenge given to us: *establish a project for a «holy preaching».*

The scope of the preparation by a community of its apostolic project goes well beyond the mere enumeration of activities planned by each of the brothers or proposed more collectively by all or by a group of brothers of the community. Such an enumeration would only constitute the formal content of the «program» mentioned by LCO 311. It is not about producing a «strategic plan» for effective preaching which would seek to adapt to the needs or constraints of a market. The challenge is to include this program within a dynamic that goes beyond it and carries it on: the dynamics by which a community of friar preachers aims to become a concrete realisation of a «holy preaching» of the Order of Preachers. This holy preaching is indeed the project, the aim and the purpose of the Order that Dominic asked the Pope kindly to confirm. The modality of the tension towards such an ideal is that of the process by which each individual is involved in the future of a community, which is committed to the future of a province and of the Order, which are themselves seeking to be like «small churches» at the heart of the Church, thus remembering that the Church has been gradually established in the world as a communion to which the preaching of Jesus constantly adds new believers. When reading the Gospel, it is clear that it is by entering this movement that each new believer gradually understands himself (herself) promised to the salvation preached by Jesus. But we also see that this first community of «friends of Jesus», discovered themselves as a prefiguration of this communion which is proclaimed, gripped in their turn by the urgency of going through towns and village, preaching the good news of the Kingdom. It is this dynamic that lives in the «*propositum*» of Dominic: to be at the heart of the Church an evangelical memory of the preaching of Jesus in which the Church is established. Such is the adventure of holy preaching by which our modern times can be conformed to those of former days through «Him who never ceases to make his church fruitful through new offspring» (LCO 1 § 1).

Thus, when it elaborates its project of apostolic life, a community enters into the adventure of a story by which a community builds itself with its own words, that is to say it becomes a house of preaching by recalling to itself its being rooted in the evangelical preaching. This is the reason why I like to borrow from Paul Ricœur the notion of narrative identity to describe what is at play in the development of the apostolic project of communities. Narrative identity, writes Paul Ricœur⁷, is «the kind of identity to which a human being attains through the mediation of the narrative function». For him, the constitution of narrative identity, of an individual person or of a historical community, is the place where history and «fiction» are formed together. In light of this concept, we can say that, faced with the risk of fragmentation in dispersed identities or in indifference, the challenge is to include the life of our communities within the «living memory» of the origins (of Jesus, the first preacher, and of Dominic), thereby responding to the call for a continuous renewal. In this way we can understand that the unity of the preaching of the Order, of a province or of a community, does not refer to univocity or uniformity, but rather to the unity of the ideal towards which the proclamation of the Kingdom has tended since evangelical times and which Dominic sought to realise in his time: this eschatological communion to which the evangelization in the world of the name of Jesus Christ wants to add new believers. In this sense, fraternal communion, always inchoate, which is built by the development of the apostolic project of the community, is a sign of this communion that is preached. Far from remaining frozen in a pointless desire for an identity that would always be the same (*idem*), the community becomes itself (*ipse*) by projecting itself in this designation of the Kingdom that is coming. In a certain way, the adventure of such a story is what allows a community to receive itself constantly as «consecrated» to the Word that comes, to the event of mercy. A «community in project», a sacrament as it were of the design of the One who sent his Son for the salvation of the world.

**The chapter, at heart**

By clearly giving to the conventual chapter the elaboration of the community program or project, the Constitutions underline that the chapter is at the heart of this process of constructing the narrative identity of the communities of preachers and of each of the brothers who are its members: «In order that the common life may be at the service of the apostolate and be enriched by the work of the brothers, every convent should develop its own program or project of apostolic life. The program, having been prepared and reviewed by all, must be approved by the prior provincial. In this way individual activity which is not permitted by the
community nor by the prior provincial will be eliminated» (LCO 311, § II). What is at stake in this undertaking?

From the outset, the chapter of Oakland (ACG Oakland, 38) shows how the apostolic community plan demonstrates how community life must be regarded as fully integrated in the overall mission of preaching. The development of this «life project» allows, not a resolution of the inevitable tension between community and mission (ACG Mexico City, 36, 1.2.1), but to go beyond it by showing that they mutually reinforce each other. This tension echoes ancient dialectics in the religious life: between contemplative life and active life, between missionary action and the internal life of a community, between community reality and the reality of the world, or even between religious life and secular life. These tensions took on fresh weight starting from the larger movement of post-conciliar aggiornamento, when the Order’s form of regular life found itself becoming less «monastic» and then the distinction between «conventual» life and «apostolic» life was erased, while at the same time the ways of living found in the convents of the Order became much more diversified. More widely, in the Church, the emphasis placed on works of mission may have led to privileging the value of «doing», sometimes to establish an illusory opposition between doing and being, leading to forgetting that the choice of religious life was perhaps best defined as the choice of a «way of life» where, for the friar preacher, it is a case of learning how to become, with and through his brothers, an «evangelical man» and at the same time an «apostolic man», as Vicaire described St Dominic. In this sense, the community project is not simply a list of each one’s apostolic activities, but rather indicates the dynamics by which a given community seeks to deploy its own «way of life of a preacher» in a project of life that holds together communion and mission.

By means of the community project developed by the conventual chapter, this integrating dynamic of fraternal communion and mission is implemented, integrating each one to his full and proper measure, but also keeping the objective of the common mission (or apostolic responsibility) free of the subjectivism of each one. The chapters insist that together the brothers take the time and trouble to inscribe in this project all that concerns the concrete life of the community (cf ACG Krakow 2004, 224, 244), the organization of its life of faith and of celebration, the structuring of its rhythms and spaces, the relationship of each brother to the community, and community practices, according to the regular observances in the Order (LCO 40; ACG Mexico City, 39). They invite the friar Preachers to value community life as both a source and a fruit of the ministry of preaching, by recognizing in it the source of their own personal life, human, Christian, spiritual, religious and apostolic”. Is it not this reciprocity that makes communities of preachers to be signs of fraternity, preachers of communion?

Here we find the dynamics of the narrative identity by which the brothers, the communities and the provinces are integrated in the «propositum» of Dominic. We are not once and for all «established» in a Dominican identity, which would be defined by values, ways of doing, elements of the history of the tradition of the Order of which we would have full control. It is rather this integration with others – under the gaze of others, and with their discernment – which ultimately constitutes our personal and community lives as «preachers», constantly placing the community and the mission in dialogue. It is our integration in Dominican communion «sent to preach» which gives us our own autonomy as preachers, because it directs our apostolic freedom to the project of Dominic, so strongly marked by the desire to preach, through communion, unity”. In professing obedience to Dominic, we promise to be faithful to his spirit and project (LCO 189, § IV), which means vowing to take part in this fraternal communion of preaching that he has established, in the name of this same desire to «to be sent to preach». This dynamic evokes the construction of the Church itself, and preaching a fraternal communion constitutes the specific contribution of the Order to that function of «evangelical memory» which consecrated life is in the Church.

So our project will undoubtedly be communitarian, not only because it is developed and evaluated regularly by the chapter of the community, but mainly because, as a fruit of the chapter’s dialogue, it «makes» the community by «speaking» it, that is by formulating the objectives and concrete commitments through which they want to be active heirs of the tradition of the Order. By «speaking» the community (its reality, its commitments in its own context, its objectives and apostolic achievements, its rhythms and the organization of the community’s times for meeting, its apostolic program), it says that this community wishes to integrate continually life and mission to become in truth what it promises to be: a community of learning, a meeting place, a place of celebration, and, therefore, a house of preaching (ACG Krakow 2004, 225). A community
that cannot be reduced to a simple «practical reality» (albeit the practical reality of a confrontation with the requirement of the «virtues» of living together, or of a «base» giving everyone the means for his personal preaching), but which is above all the place where our profession of obedience is aligned with the mystery of the grace of the Word that inhabited St Dominic. Thus, each friar preacher will play his part in the constitution of the Order in the unity of a communion of preaching. In this way is outlined the process by which the brothers «confirm» in adopting it the Propositum of Dominic. The community project is thus the «story» which expresses how a community and its members develop their identity as preachers.

From this work on the narrative identity of a community of preachers, it is worth emphasizing two challenges. One is to keep listening to the conversation of God with human beings, and therefore resolutely to listen to the Word of God, preached as well as heard, celebrated and studied together. In fact, it is this «centring» on the Word that can lead our communities to live truly the mystery of a fraternal communion in a relentless pursuit of the truth («your word is truth», John 17:17) that sets free: «It is by sharing the life of the One who, sent by the Father, breathes out his Spirit upon us, we acquire the inner freedom that alone makes us attentive to the appeals of our brothers and sisters» (ACG Trogir 2013, 40). The life of the communities seeks therefore to help everyone to adopt this style of life which «flows from this personal and communal balancing of study, contemplation, and liturgical prayer, each element enlivening the others» (ACG Trogir 2013, 45). Doing this is already evangelization: «The pleasure of our fraternal life, and the joy and the forgiveness that we share with one another will constitute our best evangelization in this world wracked with violence, conflict and intolerance. Weren’t our first communities called ―the holy preaching‖?» (ACG Trogir 2013, 45). Houses of preaching where the brothers learn to «remain in the Word» in order to «become disciples» (cf. Jn 8, 31-32; Jn 14, 23; Mt 11, 29). But it is also the challenge of conversation between the brothers. This is one of the most difficult discoveries one can make in the course of the visits in the Order: that sometimes the brothers say to visitors that «in this community, we do not talk to each other» (except for football, politics, about others, or sometimes about bishops!). However, everyone aspires to a quality of conversation which establishes the fabric of humanity without which no fraternal and spiritual life, nor any shared apostolic responsibility, or the possibility of a joint project, can be imagined. To undertake a joint project: it is talking about all of this that makes us to live, that is to take the chance of a genuine conversation where each person engages his own word, without fear and without calculating, so as to take his part in the common discernment of the orientations to be taken for the best possible synergy between life and mission… The apostolic project of a community is developed at the intersection of these two conversations – with God and with the brothers – so that the common apostolic responsibility (cf. ACG Bologna 1998, 127.3) finds its source in a common «concern for the world», «love of the world», the same «insomnia for the salvation of the world» which characterized Dominic, the preacher of mercy.

**A community « in project »: mission and itinerancy**

How can the project of apostolic life of a community be the interpretation and updating, in a specific time and place, of the original *propositum?* According to the previous remarks, the answer to this question may consider several points of view: that of the orientations given to preaching, that of the conditions realised in the community to promote this preaching, that of the common apostolic responsibility to which each of the brothers is ordered by the profession of his vow of obedience. It is in fact this profession that integrates us into the movement of the primary mission of the Son, and opens the path on which to become disciples of Jesus, the preacher. «The contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ ... And thus it was fitting that he should give men confidence in approaching him by associating familiarly with them» (ST III, q 40, a 1, sol 2 and resp 3).

But the very process of the conventual apostolic project – like the apostolic plan of a province, or the mission given to the institutions placed under the direct jurisdiction of the master of the Order – invites us to strengthen awareness of a common apostolic responsibility by a regular work of evaluation. It is thanks to such a work of evaluation that it is possible, not only to correct any errors and to adapt the response to the needs, but also to identify the changes in context and the new challenges of evangelization, as well as the new needs which could be met, for its part, by the testimony of apostolic preaching. It is on the basis of this work that we are called to have the courage to change, to abandon places or works in order to join others, to
take new initiatives. Evaluation, adaptation and mobility, indicate the real and demanding perspective of the itinerancy of preachers.

**Landmarks for itinerancy**

In view of the mission that is its purpose, the Order seeks to promote the apostolic creativity of each brother and of each community. It is not only – although it is important – to recognise and to evaluate the capacity of each to preach, but above all to promote the integration of each one in the common effort to adjust continuously the contribution of the Order to the «story of the proclamation of the Kingdom that comes».

The priorities that have been defined for the Order (ACG 1978, Quezon City, 15, §5) and clarified through the general chapters are all guides to discerning the most appropriate orientations for the context and needs of a time and of a place. They refer somehow to the horizon of the ideal of the preaching that constitutes the *Proposition* of Dominic. If, during the last few centuries, we thought that the world was predominantly Christian and that in a certain way the preaching of the Gospel could be undertaken in a pastoral way, the urgency today is to propose the Word in de-Christianised cultures and worlds. This reality urges us to develop a cultural policy (a «study mission»?) oriented towards philosophical and theological research on the cultures, social movements, and religious traditions outside of historic Christianity. The presence of brothers and sisters of the Order teaches us that today the world develops according to a logic where more and more people do not have a say in the organization of the world, which they must nevertheless accept as not offering them unconditional hospitality and not asking them to be genuine agents. Therefore, the first concern for justice in the world is the desire to contribute, because of the communion that is the subject of preaching, to introducing more and more the conditions of justice in the world for greater respect for the dignity of each human person and group. The new means of social communication establish new types of relations and social networks, building a «new continent» that must as a priority be integrated in the preaching of the Word of God.

Since the chapter of Rome, a certain number of *apostolic fields* have been identified in which our preaching further unfolds (what were called, in Trogir, «mission mandates»): schools of preaching, presence to groups of immigrants, pastoral care in the indigenous worlds, interreligious dialogue, pastoral care in the centres of large cities, preaching the rosary and pastoral care in popular devotions, parish ministry, the world of education, preaching in the world of the new digital social networks and the Internet, the pastoral care of young people, and the Salamanca process. These fields do not seek to designate «new places of preaching», but rather to invite the brothers and sisters of the Order to develop the renewal of evangelization beginning from their commitments in these areas. Dominic wanted to preach «at the heart of the Church» and in the world. The challenge for us today is to try and stay in those places where the Church is experiencing the profound changes that are transforming societies, social equilibrium, the relation of religious beliefs with the sciences, the construction of societies, and the habitation of the world. In this respect, the above-mentioned priorities may constitute landmarks for such a development.

But how are we to discern the orientations to give to such a development? Here again, the reflection of the Order in its general chapters can guide discernment since it identified the «frontiers» on which the Order is invited to be, both to contribute as preachers to the care of human and social wounds caused by the fractures in the world, and to participate in the construction of bridges that would make these borders to be not places of division but opportunities to pass through to communion. Remember the frontiers that were identified (ACG 1986, Avila, 22): the frontiers between life and death, the challenge of justice and peace in the world; the frontiers between human and inhuman, the challenge of the marginalized; the frontiers of Christian experience, the challenge of universalist religions; the frontiers of religious experience, the challenge of secular ideologies; the frontiers of the Church, the challenge of non-Catholic confessions and other religious movements. Certainly, because the definition of priorities as frontiers now seems already old, we might be tempted to regard them as out of date. The experience of the visits to the provinces have made me think rather that they still have their full value, both for the evaluation of our current preaching and for the orientations that we could give it and that would inscribe it further within the perspective of the *Proposition* of the foundation of the Order.
A community allowing itself to be expropriated and to recover its mobility

The capacity for expropriation is, said Benedict XVI, the essential spiritual requirement of evangelization. It seems to me that, in the Order, our belonging to a community, and our participation in its life and mission, are two ways by which each of us can learn to allow himself to be expropriated of himself and of «his» preaching. The elaboration in chapter of the apostolic plan of a community is certainly one of the most suitable means to encourage us in this direction and thus to strengthen the role in «government» of the conventual chapter. It witnesses to our confidence in humanity’s capacity for fraternal communion. There are two reasons for this. We have already emphasised above the challenge of dialogue and conversation between the brothers within the communities, and the fundamental place given to the Word of life in this conversation. Making a common project, means speaking together of what makes us live, of what we are concerned about in the world within which we preach and of what we understand of the logics that are at work in it, of our concern for the salvation of humanity, of our study, of our dialogues with non-believers. ... Speaking to consecrated persons in the Church, Pope Francis wrote that he expected them to be attentive to what God and the world wants. On the one hand, it means taking time regularly for such conversations (and so often we say we are tired of meetings), but, on the other hand, also taking the chance of mutual trust, of respect for the word of each one without reducing anyone to the momentary expression of his thoughts, of the generous determination of everyone to take part in a «conversation» which will be more interested in the possible unanimity between all than in the confrontation of ideological identities. Thus, and this is the second reason mentioned above, the chapter conversation between the brothers should be not only the opportunity for the development of a project, but also an opportunity given to each brother to engage fully, without fear or reserve, in a common responsibility, abandoning any temptation to «privatise» his vocation as a preacher, to «possess» an apostolate or an institution, to participate in the common life more under the mode of lobbying than of a solidarity by which each one wants to remain vulnerable to the needs and calls of all. How often our apostolic life risks being paralysed because of individual attachment to projects!

The conversation and the lives of brothers in community will also be an opportunity for them to define together again the balance of the common «Dominican ecology» they want to promote and establish. A holy preaching can indeed be described as a «tree of preaching» which, at the heart of the Church, wants to contribute to the existence of the tree in which all find their nest. But it must also take care of what constitutes its roots, and establish the conditions for a certain balance of the Dominican life of a fraternal communion: the fraternal life, prayer, and study, three ways of contemplating and of searching for the truth that He is. It is because of this that, in the elaboration of the project of a community, it will be important to clarify together the practical ways in which the community will assume the requirements of the regular life according to the constitutions of the Order, its observances (of which study is one of the main ones), the objective reference of all to the same rule so that the common mission is always protected from the arbitrariness of individual subjectivities. Very often it is on the occasion of this elaboration that a community reiterates to itself the value it wants to give to practices which constitute the «way of living» which, in the Order, support our desire to follow Christ and strengthen our apostolic determination: austerity and sobriety of life, unconditional sharing of goods, perseverance in prayer, silence, dedication to study ... Thus the project of the community will be a dynamic of fraternal life where the heart and the reason mutually watch over each other, as justice and mercy will be mutual guardians of each other.

The community is also a place where we can formulate how we would like to expropriate ourselves of a certain «worldliness». It is also the case that the community dialogue will allow us to assess the way in which, sometimes, short-term economic criteria burden our apostolic choices, or prevent us knowing how to take the risk of change, of innovation, including having the courage to risk failure. It is also the extent of our «sense of belonging» to our community that will make it easier for us to make a clear assessment of the ways in which we are marked like all our contemporaries by some of the logics of «post-modernity»: the relation of the identity of persons to their communitarian belonging; the crisis of confidence in regard to institutions and in this context the fragility of the workings of democracy; a certain «crisis» of believing together which marks all religious confessions today; the very modern risk of reducing every evaluation to a problem-solving approach rather than engaging in profound processes of renewal. Some have described as one of the features of «post modernity» the fact that it was the era of pragmatism and of value given to the effectiveness of reasoned action. In this perspective, the evaluation of the results of action is more and more highlighted. This concerns us as well and we should take steps to evaluate the community projects that we...
formulate. However, in consideration of what has been said up to now, it is important not to make a mistake about the objective: the evaluation focuses not only on the efficiency of pragmatic action but on the fruitfulness the project might have had in strengthening the evangelical and apostolic dynamics of a community. For this reason, it can truly be said that the evaluation is for the prior an instrument in animating the community (cf. ACG Caleruega 1995, 44; ACG Krakow 2004, 244; ACG Rome 2010, 68-69), as it is also for the prior provincial (cf. for example: ACG Mexico City 1992, 40; ACG Providence 2001, 275) during his visits, which are «a means of reflection and animation of the apostolic and community life» (ACG Oakland 1989, 24). The fact of periodically evaluating the community project enables us to stress the involvement of everyone in the common apostolic responsibility, thus to promote the role of each one, as also to fight the excessive individualism that can always (re-)emerge (on this point cf ACG Mexico City 1992, 36, 2.2.6). The chapter of Rome proposed some criteria for carrying out this evaluation (ACG Rome 2010, 62, 63-67).

A method of evaluation for itinerant preaching?

There is probably not a single «method» for the development of a community project, although some steps are essential. It is up to each province, during a provincial assembly or chapter (opportunities for a provincial «conversation») to formulate the main lines of the apostolic project of the province, the specific objectives of the province’s plan for «life and mission» which will be the reference point for the elaboration of the projects of the communities.

If one considers the community project as the development of our profession of «apostolic obedience », the evaluation should cover not only the objectives that will be set by the community, but also the integration of the community project in the more global project of the province from which a community receives its mission (planning of the province, LCO 107), or of the Order (cf. ACG Caleruega 1995, 44). This is in fact the subject of a number in the Constitutions indicating that the project must be submitted to the prior provincial (LCO 311 §II). Also, it will be very fruitful to evaluate how, through our community projects, we imagine our collaborations for the same mission within the Dominican family.

Because of this same profession of obedience, it will also be very useful to evaluate the obstacles that we would identify in the achievement of a community project, and which often constitute a weight for the responsibility for a common preaching: individualism, the temptation to federalism, personalisation of apostolic engagements, the temptations for the founders of groups and the risk of fragmentation, a juxtaposition of preachers which can, again, lead to a personalized fragmentation, the temptation of identitarian recognition, the instrumentalisation of the community (that is to say, in the end, of its members) for the benefit of personal projects. But there is also the temptation of immobility which can have several causes: not taking into account changes in the context, nor changes in social structuring or in the Church and its relation with the world; not taking seriously the defamiliarization of the Church and of our contemporaries; not considering the reality of real resources, demographic, for example, which require some changes; neglecting the permanent formation that would allow us to respond to new needs or calls, and preferring merely to stick to repeating what we have always done ... And, because apostolic obedience is entirely mobilized by « insomnìa for the salvation of the world», an essential reference point for this evaluation is the rigorous consideration of changes and needs in the world (ACG Caleruega 1995, 44).

We said that the conventual apostolic project is not a strategic plan. It is, more ordinarily, but perhaps in a more demanding way, the fruit of the conversation of brothers which must be at the centre of the life of our communities. Its process of elaboration must remain simply that of a conventual chapter, or of a community meeting, where the conversation of the brothers will allow time for them to share information on everyone’s current activities, to discuss common perspectives of the world’s concern in this specific place and time, to evaluate the adjustment of the current preaching to the priorities that the conversation will highlight, to define the objectives for the coming year and, finally, to formulate the community apostolic project and the way in which we will weave together fraternal life and mission. Fundamentally, it is to pursue, to recover, or to form the habit of celebrating our chapters, as we celebrate the confirmation of our vocation. The installation of our commitments and sometimes of our apostolic and pastoral institutions, has too often led us to consider that the chapters could be reduced to being moments of pragmatic organisation of the management of what is already in place. The chapters should rather be moments where the brothers, by their
fraternal conversation, become vulnerable to the concern of the world and the needs of people. Vulnerable, also, to the requirement of the Word to be welcomed, shared, proclaimed, and always carried forward, there where He precedes us, in the desire to contribute to the continuing extension of the communion of his Church. And it is to the extent to which we are capable of «consolidating» also in our «itinerant» vocation, that we will be more capable, with the entire Dominican family, of confirming our Order as an Order of Preachers, where the «holy preaching» (cf Lateran IV) is the project, the ideal, and the purpose.

Conclusion: an Order in foundation …
In concluding this letter, I hope keenly that it will be studied and discussed in the communities during a chapter. Starting from there, each community will be able – according to the provisions that the prior provincial will determine – to develop its community project. The next visits to the provinces, where the main focus will be on the renewal of preaching and on permanent formation, will be an opportunity to pursue this reflection.

The celebration of the Jubilee of the Order will remember the confirmation by the Pope of the intuition of Dominic that he could serve the Church by an Order of Preachers. This recognition was then expressed by the many Bulls which recommended the brothers of this completely new Order to the local Churches. But, in a sense, we must say that this constitutes only the first dimension of the confirmation of the Order, which needs to be completed by the confirmation that the brothers themselves, day after day, will bring to this intuition, that the Preachers wish to engage, in the image of the first community of Jesus, in a life that is evangelical and apostolic. The community project is therefore the modality that the Order proposes to support us in this effort of «confirmation» of our Order. As the fundamental constitution expresses it: «The Order’s fundamental purpose and the way of life which follows from it is the project, the ideal, and the purpose. The community project is therefore the modality that the Order proposes to support us in this effort of «confirmation» of our Order. As the fundamental constitution expresses it: «The Order’s fundamental purpose and the way of life which follows from it iseva the worth in every age of the Church’s existence. However, as our tradition teaches us, it is of the greatest importance that in times of accelerating change and development they be understood and given due weight. In such circumstances it is for the Order to renew itself and adapt itself courageously, discerning and testing the elements which are good and useful in humanity’s aspirations, taking them into the unchangeable equilibrium of the fundamental elements of its life» (LCO 1, § VIII).

The community project, in this sense, calls to our vow of obedience by which everyone is committed, with the brothers who receive it and who will in turn be received, to found the «holy preaching» at the service of the Church: «The Community project is one of the important places where we can put into practice the vow of obedience which establishes our personal responsibility with respect to the building of community as well as to the mission of the Order» (ACG Caleruega, 1995, 44). It calls for the implementation of our vow of profession, to be and constantly to become with each other, and through each other, Friar Preachers.

Engaged in this «dynamic of foundation», the Order of St Dominic may be defined as «evangelical memory», in the Church, that the Church is constituted by preaching as the «sacrament» of the loving conversation of God with humanity. In communion with you, I ask the Lord to give us every day the grace to serve thereby the Church and the world.

With my fraternal friendship,
Your brother,

fr. Bruno Cadoré, O.P.
Master of the Order of Preachers
Rome, 21 September 2015
Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès is the New Director of the Ecole Biblique

Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès was born in northern France in 1949. With a master’s degree in theology and a doctorate in economics, Fr. Jean Jacques has an impressive background studying, teaching and holding various leadership positions all over the world. He spent a combined eighteen years teaching economics at the University of Algiers and then as a lecturer at the Institute of Political Studies and the Catholic University of Lyon. In 1985, Fr. Jean Jacques went to Rome to work as an assistant to the Master of the Dominican Order giving the opportunity to travel to various impoverished countries. In 2000, Fr. Jean Jacques began his time in Cairo holding positions as prior of the Dominican community, secretary general and Director of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies (IDEO). He served as Vicar Provincial of the Dominicans in the Arab World from 2002-2010. After having spent nine years in Egypt working at IDEO, Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès begins his new assignment as Director of the Ecole Biblique on October 1st. Read the interview below with Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès.

How long were you at the IDEO?
I have spent 15 years in Egypt, 9 years as Secretary General of IDEO and 5 years as Director. They were demanding years but very happy and rewarding as well.

What do you consider your greatest accomplishments during your time as Director of the IDEO?
I think that the greatest achievement has been to be able to build a team of young, gifted and enthusiastic friars able to work together and to take over the challenge of putting forward this great project of creating a mutual understanding between Muslim and Christian scholars. We have achieved other things: building a new library wing, creating a sophisticated software program (al kindi), renovating our buildings, but I do think that the human dimension of a team is, definitely, the greatest achievement of this period. And we made it together.

How do you feel about living in Jerusalem?
Jerusalem is a painful place to live, because of the permanent tensions between religions. My hope is to be able to connect here as well with people and institutions willing to build bridges, in a country which is building physical and political walls.

When will you start working at the Ecole?
I start working as director at the Ecole at the beginning of the academic year on October 1st, but I have been already working a lot in the past months to prepare a new start for this old and prestigious institution. With help of the Master of the Order and several provincials, we are blessed with the arrival this year of 4 new professors and a new administrator for the Ecole. New blood was urgently needed. They are coming. It is a blessing.

Why are these two institutions (both the IDEO and the Ecole) so important to the Dominican family?
How can we spread the word to others?
Cairo's priory was built by the friars of Jerusalem in the 1930s to help the students of the Ecole to study archeology. Finally, Cairo community was given another mission, but in both places, the commitment is the same: witnessing the love of God for everyone by our religious life and building friendship through study and culture. It is, indeed, a very Dominican mission: community life, study and witnessing by our life the love of God for everyone.

Where is the Political Will to Stop the Wars in Syria and Iraq?

"There is too much compassion. The Syrian people deserve more. They deserve to return to their country," Thus Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Inquiry for Syria, set the tone of the emotionally-charged side-event, "Where is the Political Will to Stop the Wars in Syria and in Iraq?" This unusually trenchant and unambiguous title question drew a capacity audience of over 100, which
included Permanent Mission Delegates, NGO representatives, and media, at the 30th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The conference panel had been brought together because, as moderator Mike Deeb OP put it, the peace process is “getting nowhere.” Given the crowd and the feeling of urgency in the room, it could be said the event addressed perhaps the most pressing issue of the entire session, the Syrian refugee crisis. Deeb clearly set out the objective of the conference—to identify “the causes of this lack of political will.” Over the course of the hour-and-a-half discussion, specific causes were posited by the speakers, and viable solutions were proposed.

Speaker Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva, called the war in Iraq and Syria—boldly—a proxy war for Sunni versus Shia, and the United States versus the Russian Federation. Tomasi noted the irony in arming fanatical rebels to get rid of unwanted rulers at the expense of the civilians and their God-given dignity and human rights.

Pinero, underlining the complexity of the conflict, observed: "There are now wars within wars" and that "Europeans only received 10 percent of Syrian refugees [...] Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon need help with the 4 million refugees they've taken in.” In terms of causes, he said the war "had not fallen from heaven" and explained why. States had a plan for war, yet no plan for peace. This problem was exacerbated by inaction. The major powers were "aiding and abetting war crimes, and crimes against humanity." "The violence is endemic, as is the international prevarication," said Pinero. "This was a failure of diplomacy," the Chairman concluded.

The words of Archbishop Yousif Thomas Mirkis OP reflected many of the points by Pinero: "Compromise supported the protagonists in this double game, in which it was especially the states of the free world which stood by in shock." Thirteen cities were completely emptied out in less than a decade, noted the Archbishop. Notably, Msgr Mirkis offered solutions: "Peace requires reform." School textbooks, he said, are indispensable to disseminating notions of religious harmony, to remove the sources of ignorance, mistrust and violence. "A society beyond religion is necessary," calling for religious affiliation to be excised from official proofs of identity. Mirkis articulated the project thus, "We must begin to see the other as ourselves."

Andrew Feinstein, Executive Director of Corruption Watch, and author of the first major text on the international trade in arms since 1979, "The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade," explained how lawlessness at an international level, has made the situation much more lethal. In part, the sheer size of the market explains the destruction: globally, the arms trade is worth $1.75 trillion (all figures USD), equating $250 for every person on the planet. According to Feinstein, 5 million small arms are sold every year, valuing $8.5 billion. And every year, 520,000 violent deaths involve firearms. The proxies cited by Msgr Tomasi are the biggest stakeholders: the United States buys and sells almost as many weapons as the rest of the world combined, partly through government-subsidized defence companies; the biggest buyer is Saudi Arabia; the top players in the trade are Russia, Germany, France, Israel, China, and the UK—all self-professed doves in the region.

Feinstein, a former South African MP for the ANC, resigned from his party when his investigation into a $10 billion arms deal involving $300 million in bribes to ANC members was officially stopped.

Similar to the traffic of illegal drugs, Feinstein recounted a story of what could be called the futility of the arms trade: a conversation with an arms dealer with 50 years experience who said that when he saw an arms embargo, it meant only that he could charge a premium. Moreover, Feinstein continued, dealers who break international and domestic law are allowed to carry on under the supervision of the major players because they are intelligence assets. The global trade in arms has internal effects, as well. The corruption watchdog Transparency International estimates that arms dealing accounts for 40 percent of global corruption—public funds being used for private gain. As Feinstein put it, the arms trade is "hardwired for criminality; it's built into the structure" of every transaction, in which just a few contracts are worth tens of billions. Echoing Tomasi, Feinstein pointed out the irony that the national security that deals are supposed to support is undermined in both the buying and selling countries. Unintended consequences—what Feinstein called "blowback"—are virtually always part of the story. "Arms end up in the wrong hands, sometimes turned
against the sellers.” In the case of the 2011 Libya intervention, the targets were weapons systems sold to the Gaddafi régime by the very countries undertaking the bombings. The ultimate irony, said Feinstein, was Afghanistan, where there was a direct line between the US-backed Mujahadeen which repelled the Soviet Union, and the wider destruction at the hands of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. “And so it is in Iraq and Syria,” said Feinstein, in summary.

The panel concurred with the author's conclusion that weapons do not aid peace, but only worsen the severity of fighting. Given the evidence, it is impossible to see the war in Syria and Iraq—and the attendant refugee crisis—any other way.

But what can be done? Amidst all this seemingly unsolvable complexity and tragic irony, Feinstein, like his co-presenters, offered solutions.

"Show me who makes a profit from war, and I'll show you how to stop a war.” Quoting Henry Ford, Feinstein told a story of hope through popular resistance. At this year’s international arms fair in London—one of the biggest in the world—hundreds came to London, and simply laid down before military equipment being taken to the venue. Many demonstrators were arrested. But they succeeded in forcing the media to at least write about the fair. These same campaigners put ads in underground trains with respect to the weapons sold at the arms fair. The information is available on social media, Feinstein mentioned.

"Bring pressure to bear wherever there is any influence," he urged. And, given the fact that the greatest arms dealing states are democracies, Feinstein's directive should be realizable. Candidate Obama, Feinstein went on, described the gulf between the enormity of the challenges we face and the smallness of our politics. The problem, however, has only gotten worse, said Feinstein. Nevertheless, "Everyone in this room has a network of people and organizations which have the ability to exert pressure," he said.

The last official comment of the conference came from Fr. Bob Vitillo of Caritas Internationalis, who made an unequivocal plea for the world community to embrace peace.

At the conclusion of the conference, a clear line between each of the panelists became evident—if we continue to continence and profit from the sale of arms, we will see the refugee crisis worsen the world over.

International leadership must "denounce the delusion of military victory." We have to give names; to not disguise", concluded Chairman Pinero.

A spirited Q&A followed the speeches from the panel. Among the comments from the floor, an observer noted: "States want this war; it is in their own interest."

In his summary, Mike Deeb identified perhaps the primary requirement for peace: "For governments to look beyond their national interests.” He put it to citizens to urge their permanent delegations to take that necessary step. NGOs and civil society are well-positioned, said Deeb, to identify and eliminate those contradictions that lead to unintended consequences—the ironies described by Tomasi and Feinstein. The enormity of the arms trade, Deeb concluded, may be the most insidious problem because the trade in arms creates "a spirit of corruption" that stifles the political will to end these wars within those nations which both express and represent the greatest hope for peace.

Msgr Tomasi, putting forward a prescient solution to stop the violence, called for a peace conference. "The powers that call the shots have to sit around the same table. Then, political solutions will come about.” The next day, in fact, US Secretary of State Kerry reportedly called for a military conference with the Russian Federation to cease hostilities.
Dominicans at the Synod of Bishops

The 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – 4 to 25 October 2015

The 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will hold from 4 to 25 October 2015, on the theme, “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world”. Pope Francis will be the President of the Synod while Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri will be the Secretary General.

There will be 5 Dominican friars at the Synod.

Fr Bruno Cadoré - Master of the Order. He is an elected representative of the Union of Superior Generals.

Cardinal Christoph Schonborn – Archbishop of Vienna and President of the Episcopal Conference of Austria. He is one of the pontifical appointees.

Bishop Jean-Paul Vesco – Bishop of Oran, Algeria. He is representing the Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa (C.E.R.N.A.)

Bishop George Frendo – Auxiliary of Tirane-Durrés, Albania. He is representing the Episcopal Conference of Albania.

Fr Bruno Esposito – Professor of Canon Law at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome. He is a member of the secretarial team.

Other participants include; Delegates of the Presidents, Leaders of the Oriental Catholic Churches, Heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, Pontifical Appointees, Elected Representatives of Episcopal Conferences, Elected Representatives of the Union of Superiors General, Fraternal Delegates, Secretarial Team (including auditors) and Members of the Communication Team.

Inauguration of a New Church Building and Centre at Durrès, Albania

The friars of the Province of Malta have long been involved in the mission work in Albania and according to fr Geoffrey Bugeja, they have always dreamt of building something beautiful and useful for the people in Lagjja Mirdita, Durrës-Albania.

On 19 September 2015, they celebrated the realization of that dream with the inauguration of a new church building and centre for the people. Bishop George Frendo, Auxiliary Bishop of Tirane-Durrès, Albania who is also a Dominican was at hand to celebrate the Eucharist and the Rite of the blessing of the new church. He was assisted by fr Bruno Cadoré, the Master of the Order, fr Francis Micajleif, Prior Provincial of the Province of Malta and fr Miguel Angel del Rio, the Socius for Italy, Malta and the Iberian Peninsula.

Fr Geoffrey Bugeja, the Rector of the church expressed great joy and gratitude for this great achievement.

“This was made possible because all of us believed in this project and the urge to strengthen and enhance the human condition of our brothers and sisters was well embedded in our hearts. During these last two years we did not only see the building rising from its foundations; more so, we saw the Christian community increasing in number and in its effort to follow the Lord, its real and solid foundation.”

Profession in the Roman Province

On 12 September, 2015, in the hands of fr. Aldo Tarquini, OP, Prior Provincial of the Roman Province of St. Catherine of Siena, fra Domenico Vendemmiati made his first profession in the Order of Preachers. The ceremony was held during the evening Eucharistic celebration at the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, Italy, and was witnessed by his family and friends, along with friars coming from different Dominican convents in Rome, and some members of the Dominican Family.

Born in Veneto, Fra Domenico lived for many years in the island of Sardinia, where he grew in his faith, and where he discovered his vocation for the priesthood while serving as an altar boy. After completing his formation at the minor seminary of the Diocese of Tempio-Ampurias, he was sent to the major seminary of Arezzo in Tuscany, where he continued his studies in philosophy and theology. Through his encounter with a
Dominican friar during his formation as a diocesan seminarian, Fra Domenico came to know about the figure of St. Dominic and of the Order that he founded. He soon discovered a close affinity with the Order, which was made official when he later became a member of the lay fraternity of Arezzo. Even as a lay Dominican, however, Fra Domenico remained captivated by the Dominican life and mission, and so desired a more total service to the Church in the Order of Preachers. Thus, on 19 October 2013, he began his journey in the pre- Novitiate formation, which culminated in the rite of investiture with the Dominican habit on September 16 of the following year.

The occasion of his first profession was made even more special for Fra Domenico because he was born twenty-eight years ago on the same day. In his homily, the Prior Provincial remarked that such coincidence is symbolic of his rebirth as a religious. Reflecting on the phrase “God’s mercy and yours” pronounced by Fra Domenico during the rite, fr. Aldo underscored that our profession in the Order signifies entering into a cycle of mercy: one that is asked for and is received, and one that is given. This has always been for Dominicans a constant reference point, which becomes all the more pronounced today as the Pope announces a Jubilee of mercy for the entire church.

Another coincidence pointed out by the Provincial is the Church’s commemoration of the Holy Name of Mary on the same day. Referring to the Order’s special devotion to Our Lady as special patroness, fr. Aldo thus entrusted Fra Domenico to the Virgin Mary, that he may remain faithful and persevering in his service to the Lord in the Dominican life.

● Summer Program on Dominican Spirituality in Slovakia

In July 2015 more than sixty Dominican sisters from across Europe gathered at Badín, Slovakia, for a week long program on Dominican spirituality. The main speakers were Sr Hedvig Déak, prioress general of the Hungarian congregation, and Fr Vivian Boland, vicar of the Master of the Order. They gave conferences on anthropological and theological foundations of religious life as well as offering reflections on aspects of Dominican religious life today. In one session some sisters responded to the letter of the Master of the Order, ‘Go Tell My Brothers’. He sent this letter in 2012 which was a year for thinking about Dominican women and evangelization. Here are the responses of two of the sisters to the Master’s letter.

Sister Karola from Slovakia said:

The letter from the Master of the Order of 13 January 2012, written because of the year titled “Dominican Women and Preaching”, is very inspiring and actual also today. Brother Bruno showed an amazing sensitivity for “the holy preaching” to which Dominican women have brought a great contribution. He writes: “The holy preaching has the need - an absolute need - for the contribution of Dominican women who totally consecrate their lives to it.” I think that it is quite a serious statement. If we take it literally, we can ask: Is it possible for Dominican preaching to exist without women? Could we still call it Dominican?

In the letter from the Master we find a historical answer to this question. We can mention the beginnings of the order when the first who came to join Dominic’s mission in Prouilhe were women. It is nothing extraordinary because women were part of the community that had gathered around Jesus. The “preaching” of women belongs fully to the tradition to which we should stay faithful.

The letter mentions also other reasons for that. There is the need for evangelisation based on vivid communion composed of men and women, religious and laity. Brother Bruno uses a very strong expression, that we have to be in this world as “sacraments of fraternal and sisterly communion”. It is not just a sort of ideal but there are real efforts to create mutual relations, share joys and sorrows of life, confront the doubts and develop the desire to “find the future”, not just as individuals but as a communion. This is in order to find what we have in common and to build on to what is alive among us. In Slovakia we have an event called “The Touch of Beauty”. The general public can experience us as one big community of brothers, sisters and laity. As a Dominican family we are dreaming about establishing a group of Dominican Youth. These are just a few examples from practice. And by these examples we can see that “Holy Preaching” has a future when it is carried out together and it is more than a specific mission of any given institution.
Even more powerful is the emphasis the letter gives to the theme of life and to the very close interconnection of life with femininity. Selecting a passage from the Gospel of John brings us to the Easter morning scene. One of the women, when she meets the Risen One, gets the mission: “Go tell my brothers!” The preaching of woman is deeply connected to the specific experience of life … Therefore it is very important that the letter emphasises the unique relationship of women with Christ who is the source of all our life, their intimate knowledge of the birth of life and their sensitivity to the Word that is the carrier of life … Dominican men need Dominican women to tell them about it. The narration of women is imbued with life … they were with Him along the path leading to Calvary; they waited in the garden near the empty tomb… the woman is sensitive to words that contain life because she experienced these words …The most important preacher for me is my mother. She has never spoken about life without speaking about God and she has never spoken about God without speaking about life.

Based on the Master’s letter we could say that Jesus asks Mary and the others and all of us to invite the Church to be born from the preaching … this cannot be done without women … women are designed for the transmission of life from one generation to the next, they are the guardians of life even in times of uncertainty and doubt …

Sr Marie from Czech Republic said:
This is a reflection on both the Master’s letter and the experience of our time together. I would like to reflect also on our meeting because I find it really encouraging and inspirational for my future.

According to the letter of the Master, women belong to Dominican preaching without doubt. Brother Bruno accepts the role of women in preaching as a fact that cannot be questioned. At the same time, he is aware of areas where women’s dignity suffers. Also the value of a feminine attitude and the role of women in the Church and especially in Dominican life is an important topic of the letter. Women bring some positives: a unique experience in their relationship with Christ, a particular manner for studying the Word, a precise way to organize a chapter, sensibility, intuition, and so on. The Master mentions women’s ability to create relationships, their ability to be strong and gentle at the same time. There is much more in the letter women are likely to be pleased with.

My reflection is not a comprehensive one. I would like to deal with three points that touched me. The first is the command: "Go tell my brothers...". The command Christ gave to the apostles was a different one: "Go to all peoples everywhere..." The tasks are similar, but not the same. The roles of men and women are different also in the church of our days. It is mirrored also in the way personal consecration and community life are lived. I like it that I don't have to be the same as men in everything - even though it is "trendy" in our post-modern society. It might be connected with the idea that the church "balances" the deficiencies of society. It used to be education, later nursing, and now it should be the ability to love. In my opinion, our society needs to be shown specific features of femininity.

Let me tell you a story. I had a chat with my friends, a woman and a man. I told the man: "Michael, we expect you to behave as a gentleman." He answered angrily: "Why? You women desire to have the same rights as men so it is not fair to expect special respect." It angered the girl who said: "I am not interested in any men’s rights. I would be happy at home taking care of many children, cooking and cleaning the house instead of trying to be successful in this world of men." A playful situation, but I think my friends clearly expressed how unsatisfied they were in the world where men’s and women’s roles are misunderstood. We are not and should not be the same, and we even do not want to be the same. We are forced to accept gender principles even though they do not seem to lead us to happiness. And so the first conclusion for me is: I should be a woman, live as a woman, preach as a woman. A nice encouragement for all of us.

One more point came to my mind in connection with the command "Go tell my brothers ...": cooperation. It might be developed in some countries and only starting in other ones. In the Czech Republic, we manage to participate in common projects, celebrate liturgy together and share information about our communities. But Brother Bruno encourages us to go further: Brothers, learn from the Sisters, Sisters, learn from one another. It sounds like a provocation. We are often told: "The Brothers do it that way. Dominican spirituality and tradition mean this and that, let's go back to Dominican roots ..." But the fact is that our congregations came into being in the 19th century and became part of the Order only later. It means that we cannot go back to our
medieval tradition. The sisters are trying hard to discover ways of living Dominican life suitable for today's Europe. It might be our common encouragement, something with which we can enrich our brothers.

The most important point of the letter is the invitation to hope. We have been confronted with difficulties such as low numbers of sisters, inability to answer contemporary challenges, with our own failures. It is reality but we must not allow it to paralyse us in living our consecrated life. If we failed that way, our preaching would have no base, we would not have any means to preach the Gospel. The worst pain of our world is the loss of hope and of the meaning of life. In my opinion, if we are able to bring joy and hope to others, our success is 100%. And everything else we do is only to enjoy ourselves!

● From Campus to Convent, Dominican Sisters Grateful for Catholic Education

Being true to your calling can do a lot of good, especially if you're a college

A Catholic college education can be a significant help in discerning a religious vocation, say several of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, whose experiences at faithful Catholic colleges were instrumental in their journey to religious life.

The Sisters of St. Cecilia, based in Nashville, Tenn., take as their charism a contemplative focus, active apostolate, strong community life and love of the Church. The Sisters have a particular emphasis on education, and many serve as teachers and school administrators around the world, including four high schools recognized among the best in the country according to The Cardinal Newman Society’s Catholic Education Honor Roll. These include Saint Cecilia Academy in Nashville; Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville, Md.; Knoxville Catholic High School in Knoxville, Tenn.; and Saint John Paul the Great Catholic High School in Dumfries, Va.

Each vocational story is unique, but it is noteworthy that the Sisters’ college educations often played a pivotal role in pursuing their vocations, whether that be through the revealed truths of theology and philosophy classes, the integrated prayer lives offered on campus, or programs that provided exposure to various religious orders.

Several of the sisters were particularly impacted by the classes they took. For Sister John Catherine Kennedy, O.P., two classes in philosophy and humanities at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., “deeply altered my worldview and set me on the course to discovering and living my vocation,” she told the Newman Society. She explained that these courses were tremendously formative to her growth: “I found myself encountering and grappling with the Lord Jesus and His earliest followers in a way I had never even known was possible.”

Sister Daniela Bennett, O.P., had a similar experience at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan. “It was in my theology classes at Benedictine that I began to fall in love with Jesus Christ and His Church,” she explained. “There were so many things I did not know and everything about the faith seemed to come alive.”

Sr. Bennett had previously attended public school, so she had “little knowledge of the deep truths of the faith.” But she credits Benedictine with planting “the seeds of truth” during her studies and subsequently guiding her discernment.

Perhaps ironically, a theology class on Christian marriage at the University of Dallas generated the “first spark of desire to be a religious sister” in Sister Anna Laura Karp, O.P., a member of UD’s class of 1994. The theology professor explained “that through marriage, spouses are called to help each other reach union with God; but that God calls some people now to live a life totally consecrated to him, bearing witness to the divine love union that all are destined for.” As the professor spoke, Sr. Karp felt “a desire like nothing else” to participate in the consecrated life and from there, her desire only deepened.

Aquinas College in Nashville, Tenn., was originally founded as a teacher-training school for the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia and later transitioned to a four-year college. Sister Anna Margaret Smith, O.P., began her education at Aquinas College as she was already living her Dominican vocation, so the College nurtured
her “intellectually and spiritually, particularly because the professors at Aquinas beautifully integrate the faith into their teaching, no matter what the subject may be,” she said.

The Sisters also spoke of how these colleges facilitated direct exposure to religious orders, which proved invaluable in developing their spiritual lives. It was during her education at Franciscan University of Steubenville that Sister Imelda Ann Dupuis, O.P., “first met joyful religious” through the Franciscan Friars. Their example inspired her, as they were “men living in community, teaching at the University, wearing the habit… and in the modern world.” Through their example and a friend’s encouragement, Sr. Dupuis visited St. Cecilia Motherhouse and felt God’s call to the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia.

Sister John Thomas Armou, O.P., another alumna of the University of Dallas, met the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia during her Rome semester with UD. She “felt an immediate connection” and credited UD with preparing her to find “my peace in His will” and introducing her to “the community that would be my future family.”

Learning in an environment that actively encourages spiritual growth is also an important factor in discernment. Sr. Kennedy’s time at CUA “formed the habits of daily Mass and prayer and regular confession that remain central to my life,” she shared. “The truth about the human person and what makes for human flourishing that I discovered at CUA continues to deeply influence my own understanding of what it means to be human.”

Sr. Karp said that there were not words to describe the full impact of her education at the University of Dallas. “The core curriculum provided such a broad and deep intellectual foundation; the professors taught with such zeal for truth and beauty; the Rome program brought history and art to life; and my classmates really lived their faith.” These elements worked together to expose Sr. Karp to an “experience of beauty, truth and goodness” that gradually prepared her “to receive the gift of a religious vocation.”

The Sisters agreed that an education in the liberal arts paves the way for a complete appreciation for the human person and fortifies students’ moral formation. “A liberal arts education teaches students to question the dominant voices of the day in a quest for what is genuinely true,” said Sr. Kennedy. The liberal arts education gives the students “freedom to pursue his or her own flourishing, and to seek to help others and society do the same.”

“The motto of Cardinal Newman—‘Heart Speaks to Heart’—is the model for education, which is bringing people, especially the young, into an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, Who is Truth in Person,” said Sr. Thomas. The liberal arts forms “minds to reason, discern and judge in accord with reality… such an education can only be accomplished person to person, or heart to heart.”

“A well-rounded education can open one up to truth in so many different avenues, and ultimately the human heart longs for truth,” Sr. Bennett reflected. And a classic liberal arts education in philosophy can particularly “help young people learn to think clearly and discern the various messages they receive from society,” said Sr. Smith.

Modern culture is “so focused on productivity and technological progress,” which means “young people need to be deeply grounded in what it means to be human,” Sr. Dupuis remarked. “By bringing the student face to face with truth, beauty and goodness, they allow him to focus on being human, rather than giving in to the propaganda that the worth of a human being is measured by what he accomplishes.”

As students begin a new school year, the inspirational stories of these sisters are evidence that a faithful college education can be indispensable not only to students’ academic and intellectual growth, but also to their spiritual formation and personal vocation. But finding a college that provides this sort of education can be difficult. Each of these Catholic colleges attended by the Sisters is recognized by The Newman Guide for its strong Catholic identity.

Kimberly Scharfenberger is a communications assistant at The Cardinal Newman Society, which promotes and defends faithful Catholic education.
Two solemn professions in Ireland

Fr. Edward Conway, OP, prior of St. Saviour's Priory, Dublin; Br. Patrick Desmond, OP; Fr. Gregory Carroll, OP, Prior Provincial; Br. Kevin O'Reilly, OP; Fr. Terence Crotty, OP, Master of Students. Photo: Fr. Ciaran Dougherty, OP, Director of Vocations

Body:

Two Irish friars made their solemn profession on Sunday, 6th September, in Dublin, Ireland.

Brother Patrick Desmond OP, who worked previously as an engineer, and Brother Kevin O'Reilly OP, a lecturer in philosophy, made their life commitment to living in the Dominican Order while making the traditional gesture of placing their hands within the hands of the prior provincial of the Irish Dominican friars, Father Gregory Carroll OP.

The two student brothers, who are also preparing for priestly ordination, entered the Irish novitiate in Saint Mary's Priory, Cork city, before continuing with their formation and academic studies at the studentate in Dublin.

Both brothers were joined by their Dominican confrères, family, friends and parishioners at Saint Saviour's Church, Dominick Street, Dublin, for the happy event during Sunday Mass.

At present there are twelve brothers in formation for the Irish Dominican Province, eight of whom are in solemn vows, and a number of men are expected to enter the novitiate in mid-September.

The two solemn professions make three solemn professions for the Irish friars in 2015, Father Stephen Cummins OP, a former diocesan priest, having made his solemn profession on 12th April last.

The picture above shows (left to right) Father Edward Conway, OP, prior of St. Saviour's Priory, Dublin; Brother Patrick Desmond, OP; Father Gregory Carroll, OP, Prior Provincial; Brother Kevin O'Reilly, OP; Frather Terence Crotty, OP, Master of Students. Photo: Father Ciaran Dougherty, OP, Director of Vocations.

Yours prayers are requested for the brotherr testing their vocation with the Irish province and those preparing for priesthood.

Dominican Reflection on The Phenomenon of Migration to Europe

ESCAPES NETWORK gathering on The Relationship between Religion and Society, Istanbul, the 8th of July 2015.

From the 6th to the 9th of July 2015 a group of Dominican friars belonging to the "Espaces" network came together from different Study Centers in Europe (Institut 'Marie-Dominique Chenu', Berlin - Centro Espaces 'Giorgio La Pira', Pistoia - Dominican Study Center Istanbul (DoStI) and Bruxelles) and met at the Dominican Priory of Istanbul. One of their aims was to meet and discuss the relationship between religion and society with experts from Turkey.

At the end of the gathering, we would like to share the fruits of our meeting and to send a message to our communities and the whole Dominican Order. This is a short reflection as the discussion is ongoing.

We are living at a time in which many relational connections are becoming weaker (in spite of the reality of increased global travel and exposure). Connections are weaker between people in Europe, persons in our towns and communities, people of different cultures and religions in the international context, and the links between human beings and the environment. We have met together as a sign that there is the possibility to share our experiences and researches and by doing so living our mission as a calling to communicate and transmit our hopes. We are aware that today the Gospel calls us to build bridges, to open ways to lived experiences of community that are open to otherness. We are aware that there could be a future for individuals and societies if only we are willing to share our responsibilities for others.
We have met as Dominican brothers called to preaching. Preaching implies both hearing and talking: hearing the word of God and the words of those who are suffering. Talking implies entering into a dialogue of salvation. By learning to talk together and to share our projects and desires we can build something new and different for a common future. We gathered to talk because we are afraid that when different human beings do not communicate, they close themselves off and generate a context of conflict and exclusion.

We have come here from different countries in Europe. We met the day after the referendum in Greece. We have experienced our differences as an opportunity. We think that the European project was born out of the tragedy of a global war, after the Shoah, by sharing projects of solidarity and by defending human rights. We think that this crisis could be a transition time leading us to choose deeper relationships among the States of the Union with a new shared political project based on solidarity and a responsibility for its partners as well.

We met in Istanbul and discussed about the situation in the region of the Mediterranean sea: the Near Eastern crisis, the war in Syria, the political situation in North-Africa and Turkey, the development of "Islamic State" with its violent global terrorism. Speaking with Islamic and Turkish scholars we discussed relationships between religion and society in different contexts. We have become aware of the debates and researches which are present in the Islamic contexts too. We reflected deeply particularly on the question of how it is possible to participate in the common good, living religious experience in a way that contributes to the peaceful development of societies.

We are worried because of an increasingly more negative attitude towards foreigners, particularly towards Muslim immigrants and their descendants, in our European countries. There is a pervasive superficial identification of Islam with terrorism and violence. There are growing irrational fears that in the future Europe would become a Muslim continent and also the conviction that Muslims are not able to integrate into a democratic society because of their culture. We think that we have to make a clear distinction between those who practice violence and those who are believers. We have to condemn and oppose - together with Muslims who are longing for peace - those who practice and feed violence, while at the same time we are called to a dialogue in hospitality with all people who are looking for dignity, freedom and justice.

We believe that it is important that the presence of Dominican communities remain in regions of majority Islamic tradition and we hope that this presence will be maintained in the future with the solidarity of the provinces.

We think that the phenomenon of migration from the poor countries of the earth to Europe is a sign of our time. These migrations are also caused by deep root causes, which are often hidden or not well known. Western countries are particularly responsible for local wars, violence, oppressions, injustice, and exploitation of land. From this perspective migrations are a consequence of an unequal economic systems, injustices and indifferences. We have to remember that migrants are human beings and as humans we share the same origins with them, all being made in the image of God. We think that the sufferings of migrants are a cry in which we are reminded of the word of Jesus: I was a stranger and you welcomed me… (Mt 25,35). Our responsibility is finding ways to share in their hopes and to offer them a hope/vision of a future.

We think that their lives and hopes are an invitation for us to hear what the gospel is calling us to do. They provoke us to do theology in relationship to present sufferings, provoking us to read the signs of our time. We are also called to promote a praxis of hospitality in different levels of our life as a witness of salvation for all people. As Dominicans we have a particular responsibility to do so in this time.

Friars Thomas Eggensperger, Ulrich Engel, Bernhard Kohl, Ignace Berten, Claudio Monge, Luca Refatti, Alessandro Cortesi

*Human Curiosity and Knowledge and Christ’s Acquired Knowledge*

The 18th International Study Week and Conference of the Province of Croatia in Trogir. From 23rd to 30th of August 2015, the Dominican convent of the Holy Cross on the Island of Ćiovo near the city of Trogir in Croatia hosted the 18th International Study Week and Conference for researchers, lay students and Dominican brothers from Europe. The programme was organized by the Croatian Province and
moderated by Srećko Koralija, the regent of studies of the province. Both events were supported by the Faculty of Catholic Theology from Split and the Dominican University (DOMUNI).

The theme of the Study Week was “Human Curiosity and Knowledge and Christ’s Acquired Knowledge” and of the Conference “Belief, Curiosity, Knowledge and Cognition”

This year around thirty participants from Croatia, Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain and Poland gathered to participate not only in lectures and work-groups, but also to relax in the Mediterranean climate and to visit sites like Trogir, Split and Međugorje. The spiritual dimension of the Study Week was expressed through the Holy Mass and the Divine Office in Latin.

Lectures and work-groups held by Professors Simon Francis Gaine, Pawel Klimczak, Ralph Weir and Mikolaj Slawkowski-Rode covered various perspectives of the theme of the Week from theological to philosophical aspects. Speakers for the Conference whose proceedings will be published included: Simon Francis Gaine, Pawel Klimczak, Ralph Weir, Mikolaj Slawkowski-Rode, Carsten Barwasser, Bruno Petrušić, Angelina Gašpar, Stjepan Radić and Marinko Vidović.

The Study Week and the Conference ended with a round table discussion during which participants had the chance to give feedbacks to the lecturers and share their impressions.

● Continued Confiscations of Palestinian Land in the Cremisan Valley of the Bethlehem Region - A statement from Kairos Palestine

A Call to the Global Church and All People of Conscience

The suffering of the people of Palestine (including all the Christians living there) shows no sign of abating. We therefore call on all Dominicans, Catholics and people of goodwill to take note of the statement below by Kairos Palestine, which is supported by most of the Christian leaders in Palestine, to spread it and to act on it. Many thanks. Mike Deeb, OP

Continued Confiscations of Palestinian Land in the Cremisan Valley of the Bethlehem Region - A statement from Kairos Palestine

A Call to the Global Church and All People of Conscience

‘The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and all its inhabitants.” Psalm 24 v.1

Kairos Palestine, representing the voice of Palestinian Christians suffering under Israeli occupation, strongly condemns the pursuit of the colonial settlement expansion in the West Bank and the ongoing construction of the Apartheid Wall. Contrary to Israeli propaganda, the Wall is not a security precaution, especially since 85% of it separates Palestinian Christians and Muslims from their land, and water resources and destroys the socio-economic fabric of Palestinian society. According to international law, these same lands are designated for an independent Palestinian state, a state whose creation will bring about a just and durable peace.

The Land Cries Out

This past week, we have again experienced the pain of further confiscation of land and uprooting of olive trees. This time the drama is unfolding in the Christian Palestinian town of Beit Jala; northwest of Bethlehem.

On Monday August 17, we awakened to the news of an invading Israeli army accompanied by bulldozers and excavators set to confiscate more lands to continue building the Apartheid Wall and annexing more Palestinian land.

Swiftly and with no prior notice, the bulldozers began uprooting olive trees that are centuries old, thus denying 58 Christian families their source of livelihood, violating their rights to their ancestral lands and a normal life. In record time, the landowners and citizens, Christian and Muslim clergy, local and international activists, politicians and officials for the Popular Struggle Committee together joined to protest this new crime. They were met with showers of tear gas grenades fired by Israeli soldiers. Landowners and
priests were battered and injured by the merciless soldiers, some were detained by the army. More confrontations ensued after holding prayers on the threatened and bereaved land.

In committing its injustice, the Israeli army claims the legal support of the Israeli Supreme Court that provides a legal cover for this continued oppression. Practically, the army may offer special permits for the landowners to access their confiscated land, but will eventually halt their access because these owners are not allowed to what are now Israeli annexed territories, which is considered a criminal act fined and incriminated by law.

In the process, Beit Jala faces the destiny of most Palestinian cities and towns. By losing its surrounding green space to Israeli settlements, it is progressively becoming a ghetto. With this confiscation, Beit Jala loses yet another 3500 dunums of land, already losing thousands of dunums to the previous Israeli settlements of Har Gilo and Gilo. In total, this amounts to 48% of confiscated land. These confiscations are part of an ongoing policy of taking as much Palestinian land as possible while getting rid of as many Palestinians as possible.

The Call for Action:

“I came so that all may have life and life abundant” Jesus proclaimed for all human beings, and now for the people of Beit Jala, facing the Occupier’s theft, destruction and killing.

We pray and hope that the Churches around the world will live up to their responsibilities and stand up for justice for the oppressed. The Kairos Palestine document highlights the role and responsibility of the prophetic church in living a costly discipleship. Martin Luther King, Jr. rightly reminded the churches “There was a time when the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society”.

Prolonged injustice and oppression in the Holy land cannot go on with impunity. Our plea addresses all Churches, church organizations and all people of conscience to strive for justice until peace prevails:

Ø To pursue the implementation of the International Court of Justice Ruling that requires that the Apartheid Wall be demolished and Palestinians compensated for their losses.
Ø To call the United Nations and all countries to implement the UNGA resolution regarding the Apartheid Wall by excluding from their contracts all companies involved in the construction of the Wall.
Ø To condemn the Israeli authorities’ clear violations of international law and human rights by sending letters to:

ii Church councils and synods.
ii Elected representatives.
ii The Israeli embassy in your country [List of Israeli diplomatic missions worldwide]
ii The Prime Minister of Israel
Office of the Prime Minister
37 Kaplan Street, Hakirya, Tel Aviv 61909, Israel
Fax +972 3 691 6940
Email: minister@mod.gov.il

Ø To divest from all companies and groups that support the occupation and the oppression of the Palestinian people and the violations of international law. Three companies are explicitly participating in the theft and destruction of the Cremisan valley, namely, JCB from UK, Doosan from South Korea, CAT (Caterpillar) from the USA. Please refer to WHO PROFITS on bulldozers (http://whoprofits.org/bulldozers).

It is Kairos time to act now. All good people of conscience can contribute to correct injustice and fight oppression in His Land. Let us labor together on sound moral and ethical grounds so that we may establish the just peace we so much need in the region and in the world.

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My life in a building: A chapel from the soil

A religious landmark rises above the treetops in Ibadan but few know the designer behind the iconic structure.

Dusk falls in Ibadan and the Dominican friars sing their evening prayers in reverberating harmony. The last rays of sun shine through the window of the chapel's tower, illuminating the crucifix on the wall behind the altar.

One imagines it was the effect the chapel's Nigerian designer, Demas Nwoko, had in mind. After all, he designed each detail of the building - large and small - with precision: from the way the lack of enclosing walls allows the air to circulate, the breeze blowing the brothers' white habits as they sing, to the seats of the stools, carved like the imprint of a pair of buttocks.

Coming up the hill from Oyo Road, the tower of the Dominican Chapel is impossible to miss. Its concrete palisades topped with a cross rise above the treetops like a ship's mast. Consecrated in 1973, it is a landmark in Ibadan, a city about 120km from Lagos in Nigeria's south. But ask any passer-by who designed it, and you will likely be met by a blank stare. Not many will have heard of Demas Nwoko, who is now 79 years old and leads a secluded life in the eastern Nigerian village where he was born.

The Dominican Institute in Ibadan was listed in the 2014 book 1001 Buildings You Must See Before You Die - along with three other of Nwoko's buildings.

In international publications Nwoko's work has been compared to that of Gaudi and Frank Lloyd Wright. But his architecture is not widely known in Nigeria, and his work is not systematically taught in the country's architecture schools. And that, says his son Ashim, who followed in his father's footsteps as an artist, is a shame. "My father might not have been trained as an architect, but neither were Michelangelo and [Leonardo] da Vinci," he says.

Perfectionist

Ashim Nwoko remembers the construction of the chapel very well. He was still in primary school, and after class his father would bring him to the site. "He always took us children along," he remembers. "As a little boy, I have had my fair share of nails in my shoes."

He witnessed just how involved his father was in every moment and detail of the construction. At the time, he was an artist lecturing at the drama department at the University of Ibadan, a short drive from the Dominican Institute. He was on site almost every day.

He would climb down into the foundation to set a pillar himself, remembers his son, and if a wall was not built according to his design, he would order it to be broken down brick by brick to do over.

"Some might say he is difficult to work with, but he is a perfectionist. He does not compromise in his work," says Ashim.

Tradition

His designs reference local culture in much the same way that they utilise local materials, from the traditional sand casting technique used to create visually pleasing burglar bars in the chapel to the geometrical motifs on the landing's cobblestones as well as the carvings on the pillars.

His father is indeed a traditionalist, says Ashim, but he doesn't follow tradition for the sake of it. "He believes tradition is made by and for the people, and is dynamic, not static."

As a builder, Demas Nwoko first and foremost believes in designing a building for the people who are intended to use it, he says, tapping his foot on the burgundy floor leading into the chapel. The pigment mixed into the cement gives it its reddish brown colour.
"It is polished by feet. No need to repaint it; it will get more beautiful with age," Ashim explains. "My father knows we don't have a maintenance culture. So he designs things to be maintenance free. In 20 years' time, they must still look the same."

**Mystique**

Father Cletus Nwabuzo was 19 years old when he entered the Dominican order in 1980. He remembers the awe he felt when he first saw the chapel. "It looked like nothing I was familiar with. To me, it was part of the mystique of the religious community I was joining," he says.

As the now 54-year-old priest walks by the ponds encircling the back of the chapel, he explains how, to him, the water has a theological symbolism. "It refers to the baptismal font. To get into the chapel, you have to cross that purifying water," he says.

But according to The Architecture of Demas Nwoko, a book written by two British architects in Nigeria in 2007, Nwoko had an alternative reason for placing the moat around the back of the chapel: He put it there to prevent future extensions to his design, knowing full well how churches in his country tend to mushroom.

Through the years the chapel and other buildings on its grounds - Nwoko also designed the living quarters, refectory and school for the Dominicans - underwent some adjustments. Instead of the tiny tilapia they used to keep in the pond to chase away the mosquitoes, they now breed catfish to roast. Rails have also been attached to the stone steps into the chapel to support the older members of the religious order who have difficulty walking, and fans have been put up for the hot days when the cross ventilation does not suffice.

Today, they are considering building a ramp so that wheelchair users can more easily enter the chapel, adds Father Dominic Mbomson, the prior of the St Thomas Aquinus Priory, as the Dominican convent is officially called. He stresses that for a radical adjustment, like a ramp, they will get in touch with Ashim, who works with his father in the realisation process of his designs. "We respect the work of art we are praying in," the prior explains.

**Blessed**

The new buildings on the site, all of which are behind Nwoko's creations, were necessary to accommodate the convent's growth. With its 97 brothers who have taken the vow of chastity, obedience, and poverty, the Dominican Institute in Ibadan is one of the largest priories of this Roman Catholic religious order in the world, says Mbomson. "We are blessed with vocation," he adds.

The order, which combines a contemplative life with active preaching, welcomes visitors who want to see the chapel and Nwoko's other buildings, but there are not many of those. Nigerians are not very active tourists in their own country, the prior explains, adding: "But when they come here for a function, they're always amazed by the architecture."

In his opinion, it is no coincidence that a creation as extraordinary as Nwoko's chapel was commissioned by Dominicans. "We are an order of preachers, and you can preach using all things of beauty. Because in all beauty, there is God," he says.

Not many of the brothers who witnessed the early stages of the building project in the 1960s are around any more, but student brother Gerald Okechukwu has spoken extensively with two of them in the past. They told him that the order had first commissioned another architect, but were not happy with the design he proposed. "They wanted something more African, something that wasn't Western or foreign," explains Okechukwu.

After reading fine and applied arts at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, Okechukwu joined the order in 2010. Nwoko's design, a structure he had heard nothing about in art school, struck him from the first time he saw it. "This was a sculpture, not a building," he thought.

The 32-year-old has not yet been ordained as a priest, but he hopes has will happen at the end of his formation. "This is such an inspiring environment. Every corner gives you something to think about," he says.
One day he was counting the wooden pillars in the chapel, which seem to be growing organically out of the soil. "I discovered there are eight big columns and four smaller ones. Twelve in total; just like the disciples," he explains.

Even the fact that the chapel remained unfinished has a religious connotation to him: "Unfinished like the church itself. Just like our journey will not be finished here, but only when we meet God."

Femke van Zeijl

**Official News**

**RESTUCTURATION OF THE ORDER IN BELGIUM**

Because of the needs of the brothers in the two Belgian entities, and in the hope of strengthening the preaching mission of the Order in that country, the Master of the Order, in response to a request from the brothers of both entities, has suppressed the province of Saint Rose in Flanders and has entrusted the brothers and communities of that province to the apostolic solicitude of the Vice Province of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Belgium.

It means that the 41 friars of the former Flemish province are now affiliated to the Vice Province with all rights, obligations and privileges. At the same time the Vice Province erected a vicariate in the territory of Flanders. The vicariate consists of one convent in Leuven, as well as four houses, at Heverlee, Ghent, Schilde, and Knokke. In the Vice Province there are currently three convents, at Brussels, Liège and Louvain-la-Neuve.

In civil life the Flemish and Francophone regions of Belgium are distinct, with separate administrative and governmental structures. The new structure of the Order seeks to respect the specifically Flemish character of the region and of the brothers who belonged to the province of Saint Rose, while at the same time giving them the support of belonging to a bigger entity. The brothers there say that their unification is an important sign to the Church and to the country.

The decree of suppression and the erection of the Flemish vicariate took place on 27 September 2015. These acts were contextualised by the Master of the Order within the process of restructuration initiated by the general chapter of Rome and carried forward by the general chapter of Trogir.

On 28 September 2015 there was a gathering at Leuven to which all the friars in Belgium were invited. After the decrees were read, fr Bruno spoke about his hopes for the future of Dominican life and mission in Belgium. The brothers had an opportunity to ask questions of the Master and to offer their comments on the situation. The Master then presided and preached at the Eucharist which was followed by a festive lunch. The whole day was an important first moment for strengthening fraternity in the expanded Vice Province.

The photographs show moments from the meeting of 28 September 2015: reading the decree, celebrating the Eucharist, the group of brothers who gathered at Leuven, and lunch.

**Calendar of the Master of the Order for October 2015**

4-25: Participation at the Synod of Bishop, Vatican City.
26 Oct.-3 Nov.: Canonical Visitation to the Province of the Most Holy Name, USA.

All articles are available on www.op.org
Remember how this community project was described for the first time (ACG Oakland, 1989, in chapter II dedicated to the common life):

38 [Ordination] In order to facilitate the common life insofar as it is a sign of our mission as well as our enrichment, we ordain that each community, with all the brethren cooperating, prepare a syllabus of their apostolic activities. The point of this exercise is to identify those individualized activities that are not consonant with the community plan. This document is to be revised periodically (LCO 6), and among other points, must contain:

- The aim of the community mission;
- An outline and evaluation of its activities;
- The time and order of prayer;
- The times and rhythm of meetings;
- The place and times of silence;
- The time for rest and vacation of the brethren;
- Financial questions.

The syllabus of the community must be realistic, integral, attainable, easily verifiable, and stable.

... Six years later, the general chapter proposed a «method» for developing such a project:

«Most of the suggestions that we make revolve around the idea of the community project. In order to put it into action, we propose the establishment of annual community days, during the course of which there would be:

(1) An assessment of the apostolic work, ministry, or professional activity of each brother, and of the apostolic outreach of the community as such;
(2) An assessment of the work envisaged by each brother for the coming year, with the understanding that a priori any commitment must have a precise term of office, thus preventing fossilization in a particular ministry;
(3) The elaboration of the community budget for the coming year, both individually and communally (cf. 38.1, (2)).

These community days could be an opportune time to foster and encourage teamwork. For instance, during the course of these days, several brothers could decide to undertake or to continue a project together, and even to collaborate with other members of the Dominican Family. In this regard, we wonder whether community days might not function best when the number of brothers is within a maximum and minimum range» (ACG Caleruega 1995, 44).

... The chapter of Bogotà has proposed the following synthesis: «On numerous occasions we ask ourselves: How do we maintain the tension between common life and mission? The community project is a tool for turning this tension into something positive (cf. Mexico 39; Caleruega 44; Bologna 127-132). A project owned by everybody means that it is the community which preaches and bears witness (cf. LCO 311, § II). This project involves much more than programming timetables and tasks and is a means of empowering our relationships, of sincere communication and of committing everyone to the mission of the community. It remains very necessary that each community elaborate and evaluate its community project annually as a useful channel for improving common life. Besides including pastoral work, community liturgy and financial affairs, the project ought to include the aims and means by which the community proposes to become a place of discipleship, meeting, celebration and a house of preaching (cf. Krakow, 219-226). The community project should also integrate the priorities of the province and the Order. Canonical visitations provide appropriate opportunities for reviewing the mission of a community in relation to the project drawn up by the community itself (cf. Mexico 40)» (ACG Bogota, 2007, 164).

... We can also read, in the Acts of the chapter of Providence (ACG Providence 2001, 272-273): «But the question that concerns us is not whether or not there should be a community project. The question is whether we wish to live a fraternal community life which must be apparent in our mission and in the application of all elements of Dominican life, or whether we wish to live an individualistic life» (273, 2) and further on: «Following the course of our more genuine democratic tradition, our constitutions endow us with adequate means for our great objective: fraternal life in all its dimensions» (273, 3).
The goal of the «community project» is to develop a fraternal life that would have the same spirit, and where the missionary actions of the individual brothers and the life of the whole community would be bound in the same way. It is the realisation of the precept of the Rule of St Augustine: «You are together in order to have one heart and one soul in God» (ACG Bologna 1998, 127, 2).

In this respect, we can recall how the chapter of Trogir defined the apostolic determination which must inhabit us: to join our contemporaries in the concrete reality of their existence, in order to share with them a word of hope and friendship. For this, the chapter emphasised three essential aspects of the preaching of the Order: compassion for those who suffer, who are excluded or whose dignity is not recognized or promoted; dialogue that seeks the truth humbly and with others (in particular to struggle against identitarian phenomena and the consequences of fundamentalisms); to bring a word of hope and life opening for people the horizon of freedom. In doing so, the chapter of Trogir inserted itself in a continuity of definition by previous chapters of the «priorities» for the preaching of the Order, and of the «frontiers» which are important points of view for evaluating what we are currently doing, and what we are considering for the future. These criteria are at the basis of the identification, by the chapter of Rome, of the main fields on which to focus the deployment of the Order’s preaching (ACG Rome 2010, 128 - 184). The preaching of the Word makes our communities to be witnesses of the friendship of God, whether in the most typical pastoral situations or in more exposed apostolic commitments.

Thus the chapter of Caleruega said: «The community project (Oakland, 38; Mexico, 39) is one of the few processes which allow dialogue within the community to be deepened, and which guide and foster the balance between the community and the individual. It is obvious that this is not just a planning tool, but rather an important element of our living together and of our way of looking at our mission. For an individual, it means becoming part of a group organized in a certain way, about agreeing to attune, indeed even to subordinate, one’s own individual project to the community’s. [...] The community project, precisely because it pre-supposes the active involvement of all the brothers to the extent that their gifts and health allow, can be a useful element in avoiding the formation of pressure groups and the marginalisation of any individual brother. The community project must be based upon the real possibilities of the community, bearing in mind that it must be in tune with the priorities of the Order, with the directives of the provincial chapters, and evidently with the needs and questions of the people of God» (ACG 1995, Caleruega, 44).

Each province determines the method proposed for communities to develop this community project. Here one can only recall, on the basis of the Acts of the chapters mentioned above, the important elements that should be integrated in the process.

A conversation between the brothers must allow the formulation of the essential perspectives of the mission of the community, at this time and in the given context. This will also be an opportunity for the world’s concern to be part of what the brothers are sharing, for us to be taught by various concerns for the world that the brothers carry, because it is true that our preaching must be rooted in compassion and concern for the salvation of the world.

The brothers will come to an agreement on the main elements of organization of the life of the community: tasks and offices and their description, prayer and celebration, chapters and councils, holidays, community retreat, financial issues. The rhythm and modalities of evaluation should be agreed.

Each brother will have the opportunity to present his apostolic commitments and ministries, and together the brothers will determine the main lines of the apostolic service of the community. These exchanges must be an occasion for the assessment of the apostolic life of the community on the basis of the commitments of the community, of the apostolic plan of the province, and also of the main priority orientations given by the general chapters.

In the course of such a dialogue the community constitutes itself in gradually assuming what might be called a "common apostolic responsibility" (cf ACG Bologna 1998, 127, 3), from a common consideration of needs and...
resources, of gifts and of formation required, in the way a specific community wishes to contribute to the apostolic responsibility of the province.

* The project, on the basis of this discernment conducted in community, will have to specify the methods and order of evaluation, in particular concerning the common apostolic responsibility of the community, integration and service to the local Church, enrolment in the project of the province and in the universal mission of the Order.