

Short Report about the Laity-General Promoter's visit to some Fraternities of Germany (Teutonia) and France (Province of France)

(January 29 – February 16, 2011)

GERMANY (TEUTONIA)

Founded in 1221, the Province of Teutonia includes the northern and eastern part of Germany, except for the federal countries of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria (They belong, together with Austria, to the Province of St. Albert the Great, founded in 1939).

In six different cities within the Province of Teutonia there are 13 Fraternities totalling approximately 400 members. I visited the Fraternities of the two Rhenish cities of Cologne and Duesseldorf at the end of January and the middle of February 2011. (The tomb of St. Albert the Great is in the crypt of St. Andreas/Cologne, the church entrusted by the Archbishop to the Dominican friars as pastoral centre.)

Cologne

The Fraternity "Katharina-von-Siena," founded in 1947, now has only 5 elderly members. This was once the only Fraternity. The Fraternity "St. Albertus," founded in 1980, consists of 21 members who meet twice a month (once in smaller groups and once a month as a whole community). They come together once a year for a spiritual weekend and twice a year for the celebration of the Eucharist. The Fraternity "St. Dominikus," founded in 1973, has 9 members. Some years ago they founded the Fraternity "Thomas von Aquin" (5 of them made their Final Promises). The Group "Johannes-von-Koeln" has 5 members. Three friars are the Religious Assistants.

The members of the different Fraternities are involved in pastoral activities of their parishes, including in the city parish church St. Andreas, entrusted to the Dominican friars. They are also involved in social work and participate in various associations. Visits to the elderly and the sick, care for the homeless and prisoners, are still possible, despite the advancing average age of the members. Two of the Fraternity members are in leading positions in a national society for Christian-Moslem dialogue.

Duesseldorf

Attached to the old convent of the Friars at Duesseldorf (for 150 years) was a "III Order" group. Its successor, the Fraternity "Katharina-von-Siena" ceased to exist some years ago because of the advanced age of the members, deaths and the lack of new vocations, It was declared extinct recently. Today there are two Fraternities in Duesseldorf in close contact with the pastoral activities of the city church "St. Andreas", entrusted to the Dominican friars: The Fraternity "Las-Casas," founded in 1977, with 21 members, and the small Group "La-Pira", consisting of 5 young adults. Both communities meet weekly for prayer, formation, social exchange and project planning.

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FRANCE (PROVINCE OF FRANCE)

Within the state territory of France are two provinces in the organisational structure of our Order, the Province of Toulouse and the Province of France.

The Lay Dominican Fraternities of the Province of Toulouse are grouped in four regions: South-West and South-East, the island la Réunion and the Antilles (I was able to attend the Lay Provincial Chapter of the Province of Toulouse on July 3 – 5, 2009, held at Fanjeaux).

To the Province of France (comprising 2/3 of the state territory) belong also the vicariate of Dacia, that is, the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland (I attended the Lay Dominican reunion of the four Fraternities of Dacia, held at Oslo, Norway November 6 – 8, 2009), the vicariat of Equatorial Africa (one Fraternity in Cameroon) and the vicariate of the Arab World (one Fraternity in Iraq).

Inter-Provincial relations with the Province of Toulouse are most marked during the pilgrimage to Lourdes in October each year; many Lay Dominicans of the two Provinces are committed to serving the sick and disabled people in particular. The Presidents (*in French: "Responsables"*) of the Dominican Family members of both Provinces meet for an exchange of information and for improving co-operation, for instance, agreement on the annual themes of the Dominican Jubilee Novena to the year 2016.

In the Province of France itself, there are 30 Fraternities and 5 Fraternal Groups (=Fraternities in Formation), organised in five Regions (Paris-Ile de France-Normandie/Nord-Pas-De-Calais/Est-Franche-Comté/Ouest/Rhône-Alpes-Auvergne). Two thirds of the approximate 500 members have made Final Promises.

The Presidents of the five Regions, together with the Provincial President and the Provincial Religious Assistant, constitute the Provincial Council. It meets four times a year. The Council is enhanced by the participation of the Prior Provincial and the Regional Religious Assistants once every year.

Four Provincial Chapters have taken place since 1998; each Chapter elects the Provincial President for a term of four years. The Provincial President is invited as observer to the Friars' Chapter. The decisions taken in 2010 by the last Provincial Chapter of Lay Fraternities of more than 60 Fraternity delegates are to be implemented:

- o drafting of updated written and electronic information media, reviewing the efforts in the last six years: the new Directory and reflecting on Promises and formation; the improvement and development of the website ;
- o continued reflection on the reception of new members and the preparation of a form for discernment and evaluation of "newcomers";
- o "Fraternet": about one to three hours a day, for three years during Lent, joint groups of friars and lay persons share the Scripture on the Internet, with the opportunity of interacting electronically with interested people (a more detailed description about "Fraternet" by Mrs. Catherine Masson will be presented in one of the 2011 issues of IDI);
- o "Summer School": a project of formation, together with the nuns, planned for mid-2012;
- o attention to be given to the connected vicariates (Central Africa, Dacia, Iraq), improvement of the flow of information; contacts to the „Équipes du Rosaire“ (promoting the Rosary), to the Groupements de Vie Evangélique“ (a reunion of spiritual movements of different Orders, Congregations and groups), to Justice and Peace activities and, not least, to the other European Lay Dominican Fraternities;

In addition to these discussions initiated by the Provincial Lay Chapter and the Provincial Council, each Fraternity has its special work programme. At least once or twice a year, the Fraternities of a Region for instance meet for a Regional Retreat weekend or a common project. The Region Ile de France-Normandie also organises in addition three days of formation by inviting a speaker (the last years, for instance: Bro. Bruno Cadoré, speaking about „The fraternal life“ and Bro. Jean-Claude Lavigne about „The mission of Dominican laity“).

Reflection is important for each Fraternity and everyone is attentive to the Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. The commitment to the mission is very diverse (homeless people, prisons, labour unions, politics, associations, parish reception service ...). Provincial President (“Responsible”) of the Province of France is Mrs. Catherine Masson, elected in 2010. Religious Provincial assistant is Bro. Reginald Blondeel (Rennes).

During February 4 – 13, I was able to visit quite a number of Dominican Family members in four cities in three of the five Regions. My thanks to Mrs. Marie-Odile Cousin, Regional President of the Region North – Pas-de-Calais and Mrs. Monique Peters, Regional President of the Region East – Franche-Comté for organising the arrangements in their respective Regions. Above all, heartfelt thanks go to M. Jean-Michel Solente, Regional President of the Region Paris – Ile de France and member of the European Council of Lay Fraternities: He supported me extensively in the preparation for my visit and gave me plenty of useful background information. I enjoyed meeting the Provincial President, Mrs. Catherine Masson during my stay at Lille, and I do not forget the kind hospitality of the friars’ communities of Lille, Paris/Annonciation and Strasbourg. In Paris, the newly elected Prior Provincial, Bro. Jean Paul Vesco (successor of Bro. Bruno Cadoré), afforded me the opportunity of conversing with him and the Provincial Council members. In Strasbourg I was invited by the novice master to tell the novices of the Province of France about the worldwide situation of Lay Dominicans.

Visited Lay Fraternities:

Lille

In and around Lille, there are five Fraternities and two smaller Groups of Lay Dominicans; they usually meet once a month. Founded 40 years ago, the Fraternity “Jean-le-Baptiste” numbers about 20 members, who are involved in parishes and associations, pastoral work with families, children and those living alone. The Fraternity “Fra Angelico”, with about 14 members (8 of them being retired), was founded in 1997; their apostolate consists of Christian orientation for couples and charitable work. The recent formation themes of the Fraternity “Las-Casas”, of 13 members, was the Gospel of St. Mark and reflection about “Mercy”. The apostolate of the Fraternity “Jourdain-de-Saxe”, with about 12 members, concentrates on social and parish activities; their recent formation subject has been the reading and discussion of Bro. Timothy Radcliffe’s book “Why Go to Church?”. At Hardelot, 100 km away from Lille, at the seaside, there has been a Fraternity for 15 years, the Fraternity “Pierre-Claverie” with 12 members. There are also some fraternal Groups: “Maître Eckhart” (since 2002) with 8 members, some of them working in Paris. In addition to the monthly meetings, once a year they join together for a whole weekend. Founded in 2008, there is another Group named “Giorgio-Frassati” with 8 members, their last formation topic was on the Gospel parables.

Like the other Fraternities within France, the members are concerned with the question of how to preach the Gospel in an indifferent society? How to get in contact with the isolated people and those alienated to the Christian community? Some of the Fraternity members are involved in the

“Fraternet”-project and “Retraite dans la ville”, a friar’s internet apostolate during Lent (with 40.000 hits last year!). Members of the Fraternities are also in contact with the “Équipes du Rosaire” of Lille, founded in 1955, consisting of 15 groups having a common meeting once a month.

Paris

Within the Region Paris-Ile de France-Normandie, there are at present 127 Lay Dominicans, in ten Fraternities and two fraternal Groups: “Saint-Albert-le Grand”, “Saint-Dominique” (the largest of them, with 16 members), “Saint-Martin-de Porrès”, “Saint-Pierre-de-Vérone”, “Saint-Catherine-de-Sienne” (which will celebrate in 2012 its 100th anniversary!), “Saint-Esprit”, “Saint-Catherine-de-Sienne” (Le Havre), “Saint-Dominique” (Pont-Sainte-Maxence), “Hosanna-de-Mantoue”, “Pierre-Claverie”, Group “Louis-Joseph-Lebret” (Évry), Group “Giorgio-la Pira”.

The preaching “pulpits” of the Fraternity members are situated mainly in their families, their neighbourhood and in their professional life. They are involved in parish work, such as liturgy, catechesis, care for the sick, in accompanying families in mourning, in encouraging biblical groups and evangelisation. Fourteen members of the Fraternities and Fraternal Groups of this Region are involved in seven “Fraternet” teams during Lent. For all the Province, there are 22 “Fraternet” this year, with two Lay Dominicans as companions (“accompagnateur”) in each “fraternet” (= 44 Lay Dominicans); each of the groups can receive 15 people. As with Lay Dominicans of the Regions Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Est-Franche-Comté, the members of the Region Paris-Ile-de France-Normandie have good contacts with the Dominican Family members of Iraq, who are suffering so much because of the extreme social upheavals in their home country.

Besançon

The Fraternity “Jourdain-de-Saxe” was set up in 1945, as part of the Region Burgundy. There were once four Fraternities: Dijon, Troyes, Pary-Le-Monial and Besançon; only the Fraternity of Besançon survived until 2002 having a Dominican friar as Religious assistant. There is now no presence of any friars. Since 2003 a diocesan priest, Abbé Jean-Luc Ballanche has been the Spiritual Assistant. He was very intensely involved before, and still is today, in the “Équipes du Rosaire”. The 15 members of the Fraternity are involved in parish pastoral work as catechists and in the preparation of the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation, also in funeral arrangements, by visiting the families, preparing with them the liturgy or/and acting during the ceremony of cremation. During my short stay I had the opportunity to meet the Archbishop of the Diocese, Mgr. André Lacrampe. He is a good friend of the Dominicans and their Spirituality; He is responsible for the Beatification of Père Marie Jean-Joseph Lataste, whose tomb is situated nearby, at the Dominican monastery of Montferrand-le-Château. Before meeting the Fraternity of Besançon, it was very important for me to have had the opportunity to visit the tomb of Père Lataste, the “apostle of the prisons” and to meet the community of the Dominican nuns.

Strasbourg

There are two Fraternities at Strasbourg in close contact with the convent of the Dominican friars (-the noviciate of the Province of France is here also), situated in the centre of the university district. The apostolate of the Fraternity “Jean-Tauler” (who lived and died in that town!) extends to university life, inter-religious dialogue (Jewish-Christian-Moslem), visits to prisons and solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers. Every 30th day of the month some of them take part, at the “Grand Place”, in a “circle of silence” showing signs of encouragement by praying for Justice and Peace in public. The second Fraternity “Pierre Claverie” is also involved in pastoral and social work, for example, with Roms (previously called “gypsies”) and other marginalised people. Four of the members of both Fraternities (like two of Besançon) are actively

participating in the “Fraternet”-project of the Province of France. Originally, in 1927 there was only one Fraternity at Strasbourg; in 1996/1997 they split into two. Now, twice a year, they meet together for a time of retreat. Some delegates of the Fraternity “Notre-Dame-du-Chêne” of **Nancy** participated at the meeting of Strasbourg. The first convent of friars was founded in this town after the revolution, at the time of the re-establishment the Dominican Order in France by Bro. A.V. Jandel and J.-B. H. Lacordaire. The origin of the Lay Fraternity goes back to the year 1900! Today there are 12 members involved in apostolic activities at the Christian “Radio Jericho”, with l’“Équipe du Rosaire”, in pastoral care for sick and care in the palliative unit of a hospital, in parish work and in joining the Christian Association for Abolition of Torture (ACAT).

During my visit I also contacted representatives of the **Secular Institutes (●)** and **Associated Groups (■)**, represented in the Provincial Dominican Family conferences:

- **Institut séculier dominicain d’Orleans**

From its foundation in Orleans in 1891 the Institute has helped its members to live as consecrated lay people in the spirit of St. Dominic. In 1941 it was affiliated to the Dominican Order and in 1948 it was canonically established. At the moment about 150 members (both women and men) belong to the Institute, living in: France, Great Britain, Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Hungary, Vietnam, Ivory Coast, F.D. Congo and Haiti. Provincial President (“Responsible”) is Mlle A. Masson, General Moderator Mrs Ann Hamilton, living in Southern England.

- **Mission Notre-Dame-de-Béthanie, Association SEVE**

Founded in 1948 in Besançon by a sister of the Bethany Congregation, it was aggregated to the Order of Preachers in 1966. According to the apostolate of Père Lataste, the members want to live and preach the message of God’s Mercy and Hope in the world. Once with about 100 members, today there are only 16 living in France, two in the U.S.A., one in Switzerland and one in Belgium. President (“Responsible”) of the Mission N.D. de Béthanie is Mlle Jeannine Laurain; Bro. Claude Bonaïti is their Religious Assistant.

- **Institut séculier Saint-Dominique**

United in 1994 from three ancient associations, the Institute today has 36 members, 30 of them living in France and 6 in Canada (Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto) and the U.S.A. (Chicago). There is a news bulletin twice a year.

All three Secular Institutes co-operate via a “Bureau de l’association des Instituts séculiers Dominicains”; President of the association is Mlle. Henriette Paquay, Bro. Bernard-Dominique Marliangreas (Lyon) is their Religious Assistant on behalf of the friars of the Province.

- **Fraternité Lataste – associated with the sisters of Bethany**

Founded in 1950 by a secular priest, Jaques Nourissat/Dijon, this association has four Fraternities in France, composed of about 50 members (many of them in the region of Lille) . They have an annual General Meeting and retreat and they publish a magazine called “Trait d’Union” three times a year. National President (Responsible) is Mme Simone Bresdin, National Spiritual Assistant Bro. Jean Pierre Brice Olivier.

Rome, Santa Sabina, February 2011
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