

Monialibus

B U L T I N INTERNATIONALE N° 5

Oct o bre 2 0 0 2



Eucharistic celebration at the tomb of St. Albert the Great

Special Edition

International Commission Meeting in Rieste-Lage, Germany

- The program of the Master of the Order
- A letter from Fr. Manuel Merten the Promoter of the Nuns
- The program of the Promoter
- Notes from the meeting of the International Commission which took place
In the monastery of Rieste-Lage, Germany from the 26th to the 31st of August 2002
- A report concerning the future International Community of Prouilhe

Programme of the Master of the Order

10. 10. 02 - leaving for Iraq

15. 10. 02 - Cairo, Egypt

20.10.02 - Rome

November - Rome : Plenaria

December - Mexico

20. 12. 02 - Bogota, Colombia

A letter from Fr. Manuel Merten the Promoter of the Nuns

Dear Sisters,

The plane of the last member of the International Commission of the nuns of the Order has taken off. Gratefully I look back to a week filled up with impressive experiences, new insights and an enrichment of love for the contemplative dimension of our Dominican life, caused by a sharing of our vocational stories and by many trusting and frank talks, which we had during our meeting.

We enjoyed the hospitality of our Dominican Sisters of Bethany at Schwalmtal and of our Dominican monastery at Rieste – Lage, both in Germany.

“We” stands for the six new and the five old members of the International Commission, Fr. Yves Beriault OP, Promoter General for the Internet, Fr. Pablo Cedano Romo OP, former Promoter General for justice, peace and care of creation, who served as interpreter, and myself. “We” stands too for the Dominican apostolic sisters and the nuns mentioned above. They considered the meeting of the Commission held at their places “as an encouraging gift” by which they could “touch” the worldwide dimension of the order and get a broader view on what it means to be a Dominican.

Hopefully all of you will receive at least a bit of this encouraging spirit by reading (or listening to) the report on the meeting of the International Commission.

Fraternally

Prom. Gen. Monialium

Program of the promoter

25.07. – 18.08.02	Meeting volunteers > International Monastery Prouilhe (France)
22.08. – 02.09.02	Schwalmtal / Rieste – Lage (Germany): International Commission of the
Nuns 05. – 08.09.02	Dominican Sisters Landsberg > ongoing formation (weekend)
08. – 12.09.02	Meeting: German speaking prioresses: Landsberg (Germany)
13. - 15.09.02	50 years of Dom. Sisters of Bethany in Germany
16.09.02	Province Council Meeting at Cologne (Germany)
19.09. – 29.09.02	Northampton (USA): Meeting of Prioresses of US Conference
06. – 11.10.02	Rome / Bracciano (Italy): Continuing formation > Dominican Sisters
17. – 26.10.02	Vietnam > planning sessions: foundation of a new monastery
28.10.02	Province Council Meeting at Cologne (Germany)
01. – 04.11.02	Meeting General Promoters
24.11. – 13.12.02	Visit of monasteries in Africa
16. /17.12.02	Province Council Meeting at Cologne (Germany)

Meeting of the International Commission of Dominican Nuns

Rieste-Lage, Germany 26 -31 August 2002

24 and 25 August 2002

- The Sisters of Bethany, who have a Children's Village in Schwalmtal Germany, initially welcomed the International Commission.
- The participants in this meeting are :
 - North America: Sr. Mary Thomas Michalek OP
 - South America: Sor R.M. Blanca Gómez Cano OP
 - Mexico (Fed): Sor Teresa Coronado OP
 - Africa: Sr. Joyce-Rita Mumu OP
 - Asia: Sr. Mary Emmanuelle, OP

España (Fed. de Santo Domingo): Sor Flora María Collado Martínez OP
España (Fed. de la Inmaculada): Sor M. Inmaculada Franco Martínez OP
España (Fed. del Rosario): Sor Isabel María Gutiérrez Reyes OP
France: Sr. Claire Marie de Jésus Rolf OP
Italia: Sr. Vincenza Panza OP
Europa Utriusque: Sr. Maria Thomas Schniederberend OP
Fr. Manuel Merten, Promoter General of the Nuns
Fr. Yves BERIAULT, Promoter General of communications
Fr. Pablo ROMO, translation (former promoter of Justice and Peace)

The 26th of August

- **On the 26th August the Commission left the Dominican Sisters of Bethany and travelled together to Cologne where they celebrated the Eucharist at the tomb of Albert the Great in the Dominican church of St. Andrew. Fr. Nikolaus Natke OP, the prior presided the celebration and Fr. Wolfgang OP, assistant of the provincial, welcomed heartily. After a wonderful guided visit of the Cathedral of Cologne the commission continued on to Rieste-Lage where the nuns of community of the Dominikanerinnenkloster zum Gekreuzigten Erlöser welcomed us kindly.**

The evening of the 26th of August, the meeting began by a short introduction by Brother Manuel Merten. He asked that the commission study the text V, De Monialibus, of the General Chapter of Providence Rhode Island. Being the first meeting of the 2002 - 2005 Commissions we began by presenting ourselves in order to get to know one another. S. Joyce Rita, S. Teresa, S. Vincenza, S. Mary Thomas, and S. Mary Emmanuelle shared with the group.

The morning of the 27th of August

- **The commission and the brothers at the meeting continued to introduce themselves.**
- **In the afternoon the group ratified S. Claire as secretary for the meeting. Fr. Pablo will translate the minutes into Spanish.**
- **S. Teresa was designated to write an article for I.D.I.**
- **Corrections were made to the list of addresses and phone numbers of the members of the International Commission. Fr. Manuel agreed to prepare the final corrected list and distribute it to the members.**
- **The commission drew up a list of names of people to whom they would like to address a letter of greeting or to thanksgiving. These letters shall be written by different members in the name of the commission and signed by all. The list is as follows :**
 1. **The Master of the Order**
 2. **The Dominican sisters of Waldniel**
 3. **The Dominican sisters of Erbach (who lent us their van)**
 4. **Letter to the General Prioress of the Dominican sister of Bethany**
 5. **The brothers of Cologne**
 6. **The brothers of Hamburg**
 7. **The lay Dominicans of Düsseldorf**
 8. **The community of Prouilhe**
 9. **The 2 postulants from Kenya**
 10. **The community of Lage**
 11. **The old members of last commission**
 12. **Margaret Ormond, Coordinatoress of D.S.I.**
 13. **The bishop of Osnabrück**
 14. **Brother Timothy Radcliffe**

- The modalities for covering the travel costs and other expenses (photocopies, paper, and gas) were discussed.
- Fr. Manuel expressed his opinion that, it is important to discuss the real issues in depth rather than trying discuss everything in the papers which we received or everything on the agenda. The other suggestions or desires expressed by the different members were:
 - That a priority of the meeting should be the discussion of the document coming from the general chapter and of the question of the revisions of the constitutions.
 - That we clarify the role of the commission and the regions in their relation to the federations.
 - That we review together the goals of the commission and the frequency of the meeting of the commission.

Two main priorities were identified: The document of the Providence Chapter and the reports from the regions.

- After a break, Fr. Manuel read a letter addressed to the commission, coming from a former member, Sor Maria Soledad Rubín. On behalf of herself and her community she expressed their best wishes for a fruitful meeting and assured the commission of their prayer.
- The rest of the afternoon and evening was occupied by the reports coming from the regions and questions regarding the regions presented. The reports shall appear in Monialibus.
- S. Mary Thomas: North America
- S. Maria Immaculada: Spain
- S. Blanca: South America

Wednesday the 28th of August

- Manuel begun by reading a letter of greeting addressed to the commission by the monastery of Bergamo.
- The day begun by focusing on the document de Monialibus from the Providence Chapter. Five main subjects, which the commission should discuss, were identified in the document:
 - GLOBAL / LOCAL (n° 301-305 and 338-339): Dealing with questions which rise from belonging to an Order which is universal while, at the same time, living in an autonomous monastery. The underlying question is "How can one belong to and collaborate in a world-wide Order while being rooted and responsible at a local level, the monastery.
 - The COMMISSION (n°307): Presence of some members of the international commission on the commission which will work on the revisions of L.C.M. as well as the question of the "potestas" of the Master of the Order (petition n°157 Bologna).
 - A map of Dominican monastic presence all over the world (n°320)
 - The international community of Prouilhe (n°325) we are asked to promote interest in this project amongst the federations and the monasteries.
 - The International Commission of Nuns (n° 331- 337)

The commission shared their reactions to the Providence Chapter document. It is noted that, in general, the impressions all over the world are positive. Here are some echoes of what the members said. The document:

- **Articulates with real understanding and respect of the nuns, affirming their place or role in the heart of the Order**
- **has nourished the reflection of the nuns**
- **has deep theological significance**
- **It is a clear, strong and demanding text which should be studied, assimilated and lived.**
- **respected the petitions coming from all the monasteries**
- **is in continuity with the work and recommendations of the commission**
- **affirms the need for formation for the nuns**
- **Elisabeth is a wonderful expression of Dominican contemplative life and with many monasteries feeling old and sterile it has deep meaning**
- **it articulates the way our contemplative life is related to the apostolic life**
- **and also proposes that the brothers be formed in their understanding of the contemplative life of the nuns**

Important points were underlined:

- **the vital fraternal relationship that the nuns have to the brothers, which was evident at the origins of the Order, is to be rediscovered and developed**
- **the “potestas” of the Master is to be studied and understood**

The questions which were raised:

- **How can we deepen our understanding of Dominican hospitality?**
- **How can we develop a network of information?**
- **Why is there fear of losing autonomy?**
- **Some monasteries find that there is a problem with the process by which members are appointed to the commission.**
- **Some sisters have protested the n°300 of the document which says that the matrix of the Orders' life is in three constitutive dimensions: common life the liturgy and hospitality.**

Some responses were given to these questions:

- **The value of the document of the chapter.**

As it was said in n°293, the document is meant to share a reflection so as to further a rich dialogue. It is a spiritual document. The chapter had no intention at all to impose anything on the nuns and the document is in no way a piece of legislation. If one tries to read it in that way it will be misinterpreted. It is, rather an attempt to articulate how one can be at the same time a cloistered nun and as members of the universal Order of Preachers. The chapter commission did not proceed by a series of definitions, but rather, proposed an icon. Elisabeth is offered as an image of the Dominican nun and how it was already this way in Prouilhe at the foundation of the Order. The Chapter could have made ordinations but there are no ordinations in this document.

- **With regard to the question (perhaps unsolvable) of representation of the members of the commission.**

If it cannot yet be representative, is it, at least, helpful for the life of the Order? The

situation of monasteries is different all over the world: there are federations, conferences, associations, single isolated monasteries, or groups of prioresses. If the Master wants advice on the monasteries he must find a way beyond a purely juridical basis. There are two different principals: in government, we speak of elections and we can then talk of representation. If you create an elected body, you create a structure that has a certain "potestas". For this commission, the idea of the master is NOT to have a governmental body. He is interested in a certain degree of representation, so as to help him to be in contact with the reality of the monasteries and so that the member chosen is not purely the personal choice of the Master nor the promoter. The last commission came to the idea of mixing the way of getting members. We asked the region to propose 3 names to the Master. The region itself is to decide which is the most appropriate way for their region to give the Master these three names. In this way the monasteries are involved in deciding which three names go to the Master but, it is he who chooses and appoints. The commission is at the service of the Master, an advisory body which may make suggestions to the master, and not a governing body.

The regions themselves are not fixed in a dogmatic way. The example is that of Estavayer-le-Lac, in French speaking Switzerland, who wrote to the master asking that they be a part of the French region rather than a part of Europe. The Master respected their desire.

- Sr. Maria Thomas of the region Europe Utriusque gave her report.
- To illustrate the complexity of the question of structures, it was noted that in the region of Europe Utriusque there are no federations but there are individual monasteries that belong to federations which are in other regions (such as Oslo or Santorini), and single isolated monasteries, or groups of prioresses.
- S. Joyce Rita then gave the report from Africa.

The afternoon of the 28th of August

- F. Yves Bériault presented Internet to the members of the Commission.

Already in the last two days, Fr. Yves had heard us speaking of communications and he expressed his conviction that one of the parts in the Order that should be aware of Internet is in the monasteries.

Fr. Yves told the story of 3 stone cutters in the Middle Ages. One was asked what he was doing and he answered that he was cutting stones. Another was asked and he said he was building a wall. The third was asked what he was doing and he said that he is building a cathedral. For Yves, he is not promoting the use of a technology but is building the Kingdom.

Internet is new and, as with all things that bring change, we hesitate. In the same way, there was resistance when printing was invented, or electricity, telephones, and more recently the fax. With time, we learn the utilisation of these technologies.

An argument against Internet is that it can not be used in underdeveloped countries (and therefore it is only for the rich) but the fact is that it is the cheapest means of communication existing. There is a little mission in the middle of the Amazon where they have a portable computer with a satellite connection and a little electric generator, which has allowed them to be in touch with the Order and the world. The Dominican Order is one of the most present Orders on the Internet. The last General Chapter could be followed by Internet and the site had over 60,000 visitors. There will be a new site of the order in French, English and Spanish: www.op.org Fr. Yves hopes that this site will create incentive for Dominicans to create other web sites. A site can demand a lot of work or no work at all (it can be like a yellow page with information that does not change). It can simply present a monastery or it could also become interactive. If a monastery has something special to sell this could be done by Internet. For example, the monastery of Bergamo has hand painted icons; it is possible to make this known by Internet.

The site Spirituality 2000 is an example of a site, which has known a great success (spiritual direction, expositions of Dominican art, editorials, book reviews, biblical commentaries, texts of the Fathers of the Church). It has 600 visitors a day and 2 or 3 requests by day for spiritual direction. Two elderly brothers who normally would not be in active ministry, because of age and deafness, are fully involved.

Pope John Paul II sent out his Apostolic letter by Internet in 2001 and in 2002 he sent out two more important documents via Internet. He says: "don't be afraid to go out upon the waters of Internet and to cast your nets".

But who comes to the Internet today? Who ventures now into Cathedrals? Anyone with a bit of curiosity. There are so many people eager to learn and for whom the only way to get near to the Christian faith, without being seen, is by Internet.

Fr. Yves has heard of people who have entered noviciates of the Order, monasteries, congregations, others have had real conversions thanks to contacts made by Internet. It is a tool for evangelisation. It is a way to actualise the motto "Contemplata aliis tradere / Predicatura" of the Order. He encourages the Order and the nuns to embark in this adventure.



Points noted after the questions:

- It is as private as a telephone no more, no less.
- E-mail is a mean of communication which, unlike the telephone, which rings, and if you choose to answer it, gives someone direct access to another person. The response is immediate. Is it a true response or an only reaction? With electronic mail, one can control when one opens the mail and when one answers it and allow for a time between the reception and writing. A word coming from a contemplative normally passes through silence before it is spoken. It does not invade the monastery with its noise or impose itself in the same way as a telephone can.
- The way in which communities deal with Internet is interesting to share. One community decided that the computer would be put in a public area and that every nun can sign up to use it but for not more than a half-hour.
- It requires personal responsibility and can be dangerous for example, if you are tempted to check your mail every half an hour.
- On the web-site of the Order there will be a section with a listing of all the monasteries. The monasteries were asked to send a picture with a brief description of the monastery. If the monastery has a web-site, a link to the site can be made.
- The commission was able to view the new site of the Order with brother Yves

After the break, we began the evaluation of "Monialibus":

- The monasteries are happy to receive the bulletin.

- **Translators are needed**
- **Is help needed to cover the cost of postage?**
- **Sister Blanca will send it to the monasteries of South America (even those federated with Spain)**
- **The member will acknowledge reception so that editor will know if it has arrived. If the member acknowledges reception then the editor will not send a hard copy by mail.**
- **The next edition will be on the meeting of the Commission in Lage and information on Prouilhe**
- **The members will continue to search for translators and communicate these names and e-mail addresses to the editor (S. Claire)**
- **Each member is responsible to send a copy to each monastery of her region. In this way it takes less time and money for one person.**
- **Brother Manuel gave some explanations concerning finances.**
- **The commission is in agreement that a directory or "catalogus" of the nuns of the Order be put together using the information which brother Manuel gathered when, in 2000, he wrote to all the monasteries of the Order. This would become a database which would be the source of accurate statistics and could be up-dated regularly by the members of the commission (for example, at the meetings of the commission).**
- **Sor Isabelle gave the report from the region of the South of Spain and the Canary Islands.**
- **The question was raised as to the number of members of the commission which should come from Spain. A response given to this was: at Caleruega (2001), we decided that this question could wait for three years.**
- **For the moment, the commission needs to work together so as to reveal its usefulness for the Order. It has started to publish "Monialibus" in order to foster understanding that one can live faithfully at a local autonomous level and yet belong to a global Order. We want to promote the understanding that there are different models of living the Dominican contemplative life. Some monasteries have a deep attachment to perpetual adoration, others to the rosary, and some stress a very strict cloister, etc. This diversity is not to be feared, but rather to be respected. The attitude, which could be troublesome, is, if one group believed that their way is the only way and the best way to live Dominican contemplative life. We want to develop links of communion and understanding and thus keep the nuns of the Order united under one roof.**

Thursday morning, 29th of August

Brother Manuel presented a report on the International Community of Prouilhe. This report shall be published in the next issue of "Monialibus".

In response to questions and remarks:

- **There will be sisters who will go to Prouilhe for 1 to 3 years and others who will go and stay for life. This gives continuity and yet flexibility.**
- **Only sisters supported by their communities, and with a letter from the prioress, are accepted. So, it cannot be only the personal idea of a sister.**

- In general the communities do not have sisters to spare and those who are capable of such a challenge are sisters who are vital for the community. To this Manuel talked of Sister Catalina. Her chapter met many times and finally, although her community is in great need, they agreed to send her. It is an act of trust; they hope that God will bless them. Their reflection turned around this question: how our community and the Dominican life in the world will continue in the future?
- In Peru, the federation asked that the sisters interested in the project start by learning French. There are two or three nuns who are doing so with the perspective of eventually joining the community of Prouilhe.
- Can the nuns arrive after the 2nd of February 2003? Yes, and language is not a condition but, without a doubt, it would be helpful.
- As for voting rights, the nuns will have the same rights that they had in their own communities.
- The community of Prouilhe will keep its' links with the French federation and be accompanied by a member of the council and by Fr. Manuel.

In what ways can the International Commission support the new Community of Prouilhe?

- Ask the monasteries to send books in English and Spanish
 - Encourage initiatives like that of the federation of Peru, in other federations/regions of the world.
 - Promote the project in the region.
 - Could Prouilhe be a place of formation for nuns from other parts of the world?
- We listened to a moving presentation by Fr. Pablo Romo the former promoter of Justice and Peace for the Order.

"Justice and Peace" is not a work we "do" but rather, what we "are". It is an expression of our spirituality which flows out from our contemplation. There is no dichotomy. It overflows from our very being, from our faith, and from our love. It is our nature to be full of compassion when we see the destruction or violation human lives or of creation. Fra Angelico painted Dominique contemplating at the foot of the cross, to show that our understanding of the Order flows from the mercy and compassion of Dominic. We cannot be indifferent when we see the Crucified one. St. Catherine of Sienna remained close to the prisoner condemned to death. She did not ask if he was guilty or not but said that she saw Jesus her beloved in this man. Las Casas said "I have seen the crucified Saviour thousands of times in the faces of the crucified Indians. In the Order we have so many examples of compassion (ex: Father Lataste who founded the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Bethany with whom the commission stayed). Compassion is the fundamental expression coming from our souls, which are searching for Jesus and have found him in the poor. If this is not so, then we are just social workers. Fr. Pablo spoke of many examples of brothers and sisters who are risking their lives or who are living mercy and compassion in a hidden yet very real way.

Henri de Rosier

Iraq, East Timor, Congo

The brothers in Geneva

Some discriminating laws in Pakistan changed thanks to Dominicans

Small ways to defend lives

A commitment with regards to consummation (with a global vision)

Working for inculturation, development, inter religious dialogue

Doing this builds peace. Without this, we prepare for war.



- In the discussion afterwards the commission spoke of the Fast for Peace, which starts the 1st of September. It is seen that this project could especially interest the nuns since it is in accordance with our life of prayer and penitence.

Friday the 30th of August

- We started our day by reading the letters of greetings, which have arrived from Prouilhe, Torrente, from the Federation of l' Inmaculada in Spain, from Nocera Inferiore, and from Bambui.
- We then discussed n° 307 of the Chapter of Providence, which asks that: a commission be set up, made up of members of the International Commission of Nuns and other experts to consider such proposed changes to the book of Constitutions of Nuns in accordance with the norms indicated in L.C.M.182. The same commission is also to study the themes mentioned in petition n° 157 of the General Chapter of Bologna: namely, the "potestas" of the Master of the Order and the General Chapters vis-à-vis the nuns, and implications thereof.

A call asking for propositions of eventual revisions to L.C.M. was made in a letter sent out to all the monasteries by Fr. Manuel in the name of the Master of the Order. Although a deadline was set there are still propositions for revisions coming in to the Curia. S. Lee of the USA has agreed to make synopses of all the propositions. Brother Carlos would now like to nominate the members of this special commission, which is to be made up of some of the members of the International Commission and some experts. The commission must not be more than 10 persons.

- Brother Manuel then asked the Commission to propose the names of eventual experts and names of nuns within our Commission.
- Follow up: there was an exchange of ideas on how the experience of the meetings is transmitted to the regions and to the communities? How can this transmission be improved? Think of the different levels or means of communicating so that all the monasteries receive an echo of the meeting. Normally all the monasteries should receive "Monialibus". It could be interesting to use the existent bulletins in the federations or regions and, if non-existent or not possible, to write a special letter to the monasteries. Not all of the monasteries have access to e-mail. Some members are invited to speak at the federal assemblies, prioresses meeting or other gatherings. In the African region, there will be a meeting in December where various ideas can be discussed. It is felt that some sort of regional organisation (respecting the links that the monasteries have with various federations) should be put into place. Perhaps also, a regional bulletin would be helpful, or a sister designated in each community to be a correspondent.

Regarding the commission:

- It does not deal with cloister questions, it is not a decision making body.
- Different aspects of the life are stressed in different parts of the world. The commission attempts to respect and take into account the legitimate diversity of Dominican contemplative life around the world. It is clear that there is a deep unity, an agreement with that which is the essential of Dominican life, there is a common foundation but the form or modalities of the life are different.
- The commission is a body of communion at the service of the Master
- The monasteries are autonomous, many are not in federations, and the only point of structural unity, where matters concerning all the nuns can be brought forward, is the Master of the Order. He wants and needs to be informed, to have knowledge of what the nuns think. He desires to work with federations conferences and associations and the commission (which is not a legislative body) in order to get help so that he does not have to act only apart from his own ideas. How can he manage concretely?
- A simple example of the difficulty in communicating directly to the monasteries is when Manuel wrote the letter calling for petitions for the chapter and propositions for revisions of LCM. The process took a whole week of his time. He had to have it translated into 5 languages, make the photo copies, fill and write the envelopes, carry the packages and pay for the postage at the Vatican* all by himself. With a commission to help him, a letter can be sent by electronic mail to the members who find ways to translate it into the different languages (about 16). The costs in time and money for the photocopying and mailing are divided by 11 and thus shared by all. That is why one reason for the commission is this service which it can provide in facilitating communication.
- Each member received a Rosary which was made by Christians in Palestine. The Dominican family of Europe are selling them in order to express solidarity and show that we care and do not forget to pray with and for them.
- We heard short versions of the reports of Mexico, Asia, Italy, Spain (Fed. de Santo Domingo) and France.
- Evaluation - the Commission took time in silence to reflect on the following points before sharing together :
- impressive experiences of the meeting
 - sharing of the stories of our vocations
 - discovering our likeness, common bonds, and fragility
 - unity in our diversity
 - communion
 - the open spirit, simplicity and sincerity
 - the free expression of points of difficulty
 - the presence and input of Fr. Pablo and Fr. Yves
 - the discovery of another region, country, and culture : Germany
 - the celebration at the tomb of St. Albert the Great and his presence
 - the sisters of Bethany

- the nuns of Rieste-Lage and their hospitality and the piece of theatre which they presented
 - the meeting with the bishop of Osnabrück
 - aspects for which they want to express gratitude
 - for the trust and frankness
 - for Fr. Manuel (preparation and facilitation), Fr. Pablo (presence, translations, presentation), Fr. Yves (presence, translations, presentation), S.Claire (for her work as secretary of the meeting)
 - for the community of Rieste-Lage which welcomed us so kindly
 - for the document of the Chapter of Providence and Fr. Carlos
 - for the constant expressions of kindness and mercy amongst us and the patience of Manuel .
 - if they wanted to express something with regards to the contents of the meeting
 - the reports which were long this time will not need to be so the next time
 - The presence and presentations of Fr. Pablo (Justice and Peace) and Fr. Yves (Internet) were in harmony with what became the theme of the meeting "How can one belong to and collaborate in a world-wide Order while being rooted and responsible at a local level, the monastery".
 - any propositions for the next meeting
 - 10 minutes of silent prayer together each day
 - that the report of the promoter be first on the agenda
 - that we not spend as much time on the reports but only add new information
 - hear a report on Prouilhe
 - hear a progress report on the work of the commission conducting the reflections on future revisions of LCM
 - have a conference on the history of Prouilhe
 - try to improve our language skills
- The next meeting of the International Commission of Nuns will be held in Prouilhe from the 19 to the 26th of October 2003.



At the evening meal, gifts and expressions of gratitude were exchanged with the community of Lage. And just before the departure for the Sisters of Bethany in Waldniel, a group photo was taken.

Sister Claire Marie op
(Secretary)

REPORT ON THE MEETING OF DOMINICAN NUNS AT PROUILHE TO REFLECT ON THE CREATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In response to an invitation from the Monastery of Sainte-Marie de Prouilhe, seven sisters, sent by communities in various parts of the world (Japan, Philippines, USA, Spain, Belgium, Portugal) met there for three weeks (28 July- 18 August), together with the community and the Promoter General for the nuns of the Order, Fr Manuel Merten o.p. Their task was to study the feasibility of creating an international community of Dominican nuns in this, the birthplace of the Order, so closely associated with the life of Saint Dominic. Ideally this project, whilst centred on a truly contemplative community devoted essentially to the life of prayer, would also seek to develop Prouilhe, through collaboration with the whole Order, as a vibrant centre, able to provide spiritual renewal and formation in various aspects of the life of the Order for the whole of the Dominican family.

The first stage of this project is to reinforce the existing community of nuns by the integration of new members from abroad, and this process of “internationalisation” formed the essential of the exchanges during the three weeks.

Ways of working

An initial stage was devoted to “getting to know” each sister, newcomers and Prouilhe community members alike; this was an in-depth and moving process. Then work was begun on giving flesh to a vision of an international monastery. The method adopted was a working group composed of the seven sisters from abroad and seven sisters from Prouilhe. As at this stage language skills had not yet been acquired by a majority of sisters, the exchanges were facilitated by means of consecutive translation in English, French and Spanish provided by the sisters themselves.

Appropriately enough, the process was begun by a working session devoted to dreams, where each of the fourteen sisters outlined her own vision of what an international monastery at Prouilhe might be, as well as being, first and foremost, a fervent cell for the regeneration of contemplative life. Frequent reference was made to such ideals as “a light for the Order”, “a place for Dominicans to access their sources”, “a place of welcome for the Dominican family”, “a powerhouse of Dominican spirituality”, “a centre for Dominican history”.

Then the serious work of planning got underway, alternating between plenary sessions and work in sub-groups, which reported back on their reflection on specific subjects, both to the working group of fourteen sisters, and to the whole of the community. In the plenary sessions, the aim was to arrive at a consensus on certain major proposals, whilst at the same time noting those points that would need further discussion at a later stage.

Liturgy

Following this procedure a number of topics were discussed and corresponding resolutions passed. As liturgy and prayer are highly significant aspects of the life of contemplative nuns, priority was given to these issues, so that the planned community would be able to commence with basic decisions in place for its prayer life, adapted to its new, international identity. It was necessary as a starting point to determine the languages in which the community would function, and hence in which its liturgy would be celebrated. For obvious geographical and cultural reasons, it was decided that French would remain the principal language, but that English and Spanish would also have the status of official languages of the community. Hence all three languages would be regularly used in the liturgy, with celebration of Sunday Eucharist in English or Spanish once a month, as well as frequently during the week. These languages will also be incorporated into the liturgy of the hours, which will undergo a process of simplification, based essentially on the adoption of the Roman breviary, in order to make it easier for sisters arriving from abroad to enter into the liturgy celebrated at Prouilhe. This mix of cultural origins living a life of prayer in common would be a powerful sign of unity in today's divided world.

The new community would hope to see some arrangement put in place which would permit Dominican brethren, with appropriate language skills, to be regularly available for celebrating mass with the international community at Prouilhe, as well as for ensuring access to the sacrament of reconciliation in their own language for sisters from other countries.

There was general agreement that language learning should be a two-way process, i.e. that it was not simply incumbent on sisters from abroad to learn French, but that keeping always in mind the international nature of the community, language training would also be provided in the other official languages of the project, English and Spanish, for all of those French sisters for whom it was a possibility. As language skills need to be urgently acquired for the successful functioning of the community, it was decided to have recourse to specialist outside help, by either sending sisters to short intensive courses at a language school in a nearby town, or by hiring a teacher to give courses in the monastery for those sisters for whom this solution would be more appropriate. Back-up from multi-media language learning methods (CD-ROMs, cassettes etc.) would also be fully utilised.

The project intends to be accessible to all sisters, regardless of language skills, as adequate training would in future be provided at or near Prouilhe.

The monastic community resolved to subscribe to periodicals, newspapers and journals in its new official languages, as well as seeking to acquire for its library an adequate range of books in English and Spanish. Hopefully a certain number would be forthcoming as a result of appeals to other houses of the Order to donate duplicate copies for this new community. In the field of information technology, a wider availability of access to Internet for study purposes should be considered.

The common life

It was generally recognised that the success of the new venture would depend very largely on the quality of common and fraternal life established. With this aim in view, time was devoted to discussion of subjects such as the circulation of information within the community, the need for longer recreations, a review of their management, with the possible use of smaller groups in an initial period, the importance of celebrations in the building up of community life, and the ideal of gospel-sharing, also in groups. The increased importance of family visits for sisters from abroad was stressed, as well as the need for times of relaxation and also of silence and solitude (desert days) as a natural concomitant to the intensely fraternal life envisaged for the international community.

In fidelity to the Dominican tradition, sisters would need adequate time for study, in both its personal and community dimensions. Besides the language learning programme, ideally some strong focus in the areas of Dominican history and spirituality would emerge, as well as on-going in-put in theology and Bible studies. The community would combine its own resources in this respect with those of invited brother and sister conference givers.

Government

Given the essentially new and international character of the planned community, consideration had to be given to the question of the government of the monastery. It would be desirable for new members to be able to participate fully in this process. Recognising that a pre-condition for prioral elections is a community where the sisters already know each other well and have gained a certain experience of living together, it was felt more appropriate in the first instance, to begin the project with a prioress appointed by the Master of the Order, after a due process of consultation of the parties concerned. This appointment, possibly for one year, would hopefully be supported by the usual structures of Dominican government: sub-prioress, council and chapter.

It is envisaged that the project would be guided in an on-going way by Fr Manuel Merten o.p. and a member of the federal council of the French Dominican nuns.

The process of reflection was stimulated by a certain number of visits from important representatives of the Order of Preachers, notably its Master, Fr. Carlos Alfonso Azpiroz Costa, the Provincial of the Dominican province of Toulouse, the Council of the Federation of French Dominican nuns together with its religious assistant, representatives of the Federation of Dominican sisters of active life, as well as many members of lay Dominican fraternities. The bishop of Carcassonne celebrated the mass on the feast of St Dominic. All of this helped the volunteers to situate this time of planning firmly within the context of the Order and the Church.

An afternoon was also devoted to reviewing the plans for the restoration of the basilica of Prouilhe as an enhanced place for major Dominican liturgical celebrations. Structures are already in place for the development of this project, which aims at completion in time for the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the founding of the monastery in 2006.

The more cerebral work of reflection on all of these topics was punctuated by several Dominican pilgrimages, which enabled the volunteers to experience tangibly the holy places associated with the origins of the Order. The whole programme began with a communal "ascent" of the hill of Fanjeaux for the whole Prouilhe community, culminating with mass in St Dominic's room; later came a visit to Carcassonne and Montréal with Fr Elie Pascal OP, and finally a day spent in Toulouse, visiting the house of Pierre Seilhan, the "Jacobins" convent, as well as receiving hospitality at the friars' convent at Ranguel.

Beginnings and an invitation

The whole of the three weeks were lived out in an atmosphere of joyful and very Dominican communion with the whole community at Prouilhe, and a decision was taken to begin the common life of the new international monastery on 2nd February 2003, feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. This feast is now associated with the consecrated life, and so is an appropriate moment to begin such a venture. Tentative suggestions were made concerning an inaugural celebration at that time.

All of the sisters present were unanimous in inviting other nuns of the Dominican Order throughout the world to come and join them in this exciting venture. It is possible to make a temporary commitment to the project, but at this early stage, sisters are asked to offer themselves

for a minimum period of one year. The community of Prouilhe entrusts this project to the prayers of their brothers and sisters in Saint Dominic knowing that what is impossible for men is possible for God (cf. Lc 1,37; Lc 18,27).