

Monialibus

*Nuns of the Order of Preachers
International Bulletin*



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New Commission of Nuns



" I am coming to gather the nations of every language"

(Is 66,18)

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The **Monialibus** is the official International Bulletin of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers published by the International Commission of Nuns (ICNOP) twice a year in January and July. It is available at the website of the Order – www.op.org

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Letter of fr. Brian, op

Dear Sisters in St. Dominic

It is summer in the northern hemisphere and winter in the south. The Feast of our Father St. Dominic is a time to stop and give thanks for the different seasons – both liturgical and climatic.

The change of the seasons reminds us that we too are always changing, always on a journey with God and towards God. Dominic was always on a journey, and as he walked he spoke with God about God.

I have visited many regions and monasteries since January (South America, Caribbean, Philippines, USA, Canada, Italy, France and Spain). I am always surprised to find so much joy and hope among the nuns – even in the monasteries that are growing old and small. After all, our lives also have their seasons. This is the wisdom behind the beautiful text from Ecclesiastes: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Eccl. 3, 1-2). When I look into the eyes of the younger sisters, I see the lively colors of Springtime, joy and hope. When I look into the eyes of the older sisters, I see the soft colors of Autumn, wisdom and faithfulness.

Dominic preached according to each season. He did not preach the same message to the innkeeper in Toulouse as he did to the nuns in Prouilhe. God has a Word for each season and for each human heart. The Order needs you, our dear sisters in the Holy Preaching, to help all of us be attentive to the seasons of God’s heart and the seasons of our world. This is one of the gifts of the contemplative dimension of our life: to be attentive. Your prayerful listening to the scriptures, your study and your dignified celebration of the liturgy are integral parts of the Order’s mission of preaching, which call us to be always attentive to the signs of the times.

I end these greetings with words from our brother in St. Dominic, fr Bruno Cadoré. In April and May the Master gathered with the prioresses of the monasteries of Spain and Italy,

to encourage the nuns to enter ever-more deeply into the heart of the Order’s preaching mission – especially as the Holy Father begins the preparations for the upcoming Synod on the New Evangelization. Here are fr Bruno’s words:

“You, the nuns give testimony with your prayer, common life, study and hospitality. This testimony is part of the mission, the preaching of the Order. First you are Dominican and then contemplative. Today this mission is very important. Let us know how you participate in the mission of the Order. What are your problems and prospects? As Master of the Order, I want to help and support the mission of our sisters, the nuns. How do you collaborate in the mission of the Order? We all have to proclaim the Gospel which is the Good News for the world. That is the mission to be prepared at present and in the future of the Order. You, the nuns, have part in this mission”

Have a blessed season of preaching!!

Fraternally in St. Dominic, attentive apostle to the signs of the times.

fr. Brian Pierce, OP

Original: English

Nine days: toward a year and more...

From Sept 22 to 30, 2010, the sisters in initial formation had their yearly theology sessions; the theme this time being the Trinity – the final stage in a five-year cycle of study.

We arrived at Chalais in the evening of the 21st and by the next morning we were at work with fr. Jean-Michel Poffet, who guided us for two days on the biblical paths of the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity. His experience of life in Jerusalem enriched his teaching with anecdotes and vivid examples.

The next two days were consecrated to the theology of the Trinity. Fr. Emmanuel Durand began his class by telling us that Trinitarian faith and theology are not some complicated item in our faith, some enigma to be decoded, but the structural base of all of Revelation.

First we followed him through St. Thomas’s contribution to Trinitarian theology- his three fundamental points: procession, relation, person. Then we were instructed about

the origins and recent progress of ecumenical dialogue in regard to the Filioque, about contributions to theology of the Trinity by three twentieth-century theologians (Barth, Rahner, Balthasar), and about the relationship between Trinity and community, our Trinitarian faith being an anchor for our hope in our grace-given ability to create real places of communion.

Sunday, day of the Resurrection and of rest, came along at this point! We had the great joy of being accompanied by fr. Denis Bissuel in our discovery of the Charterhouse in all its forms: mountain, liqueur and monk! After visiting the museum which shows the life of Carthusians, we celebrated Mass in the Hospitality Center for Families, where we received the gift of a meeting with Dom Benoit. This Carthusian spoke to us very serenely and simply of the realities of the Carthusian eremitic life. "In the cell, one is happy or one is not" - a remark which put us face to face with The Essential! The day ended with a visit to the church of St. Hugo of Chartreuse, and our discovery of the works of the artist. Arcabas.

After the day of rest, fr. Michel Demaison continued theological reflection with us by examining the impact of faith in the Trinity on our ideas about human beings and about ethics: how the uniqueness of our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, considered from the side of our existence and our action. Created in the image of God and freed by his grace, we are brought to the idea that God, infinitely happy, is eternally happy for us.

Finally it was Sr. Marie of Langeac who plunged us into the Trinitarian Mystery as preached by the Fathers of the Church! She showed us how the approach to the Trinity by the pre-Nicene Fathers, and the historico-political-Arian context, led to the profession of Trinitarian faith at the Council of Nicea. And how from Nicea to Constantinople, Athanasius, Hilary, and Basil defended (the language of) "eternal generation" and opposed the heresies which denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Without neglecting the question of the Filioque and the theology of perichoresis, Sister Marie finished by speaking to us of the great work of St. Augustine, "On the Trinity". Sharing

with us the wonderful fruit of her work and her contemplation, Sister Marie invited us, step by step, to make of this mystery the place of our prayer and our lectio divina. The session ended with meditation on the final prayer of the De Trinitate, which gave us a beautiful occasion to lift up our own praise to the Trinity.

These study days were also days of good sisterly encounters for us. We met Sr. Ingeborg-Marie, Anne-Claire, Sophie, and Marie-Alix, who were participating for the first time. We said good-bye to four sisters who finished their formation cycle this year: Sr. Marie Elisabeth, Sr. Natalie of Mercy, Sr. Anne-Samuel, and Sr. Maria Andrea.

We were especially touched by the hospitality of the Chalais community: their availability, their changes of schedule so that we could have more time for classes, our visits to the church, the cookie-bakery, and the monastery. Our thanks go also to each of our communities as well as to those monasteries of the Federation who have no sister in formation but who allow us to receive such riches for our Dominican life and nourishment for our personal study. A year will not be enough to take all the roads which we found on the other side of the doors opened for us during these nine days.

Your sisters,
Sr. Maiwenn of Beaufort and
Sr. Marguerite of Orbey

Original: French

African Monasteries Meet

It is always a joy to read the Monialibus and hear news from the Dominican Monasteries round the World as well as read articles on various topics of interest written by the nuns. I cannot boast of much contribution to the Monialibus from this Region but may be it is not time yet. Hopefully that time will come.

Our present article is about our Regional Meeting held in December from 2nd to 8th 2010. This meeting took place at the Monastery of Bambui in the Cameroons. Our Regional Meetings usually consist of the Prioresses of the Monasteries who come with a sister delegated

by the communities. This year however one of our main topics was Formation especially Initial Formation. So it had been suggested that the delegate be the Formator in the community. This was because of their needed contribution during the discussion on Formation. It worked very well.

Our Region has Nine Monasteries but only Six(6) were represented. We had invited Fr. Brian OP. Promotor, but at the last minute he discovered he could not come. We had also invited Fr Roger OP., the former Assistant to the Master for Africa to come as the moderator. Generously he accepted and indeed came. However his health was not good and he ended up spending most of the time resting. We encouraged him to take time to rest and fortunately a Doctor he consulted also told him the same. On one of the days he was able to be with us, he gave us a beautiful talk on the Four Pillars of the Dominican Life which we had asked him to prepare.

So there we were, with two brothers knocked out of our company, we had to take care of ourselves and indeed that is just what we did. One of us acted (as she had been requested) as the English/French translater and she did a wonderful job. May be God wanted our hidden talents to come out. But we still need our brotherswell next time. The meeting very went well with Sr Joyce Rita and Sr Monica somehow filling in for Fr Roger.

At the end of it all, we all felt that the meeting was very enriching and we were able to accomplish a great deal. Participation and sharing were excellent. The only problem was that we did not have enough time for all we wanted to do. However one of the things we were able to come up with was a Common-Formation-Programme which we will try to put into effect as best as possible before our next meeting in three years.

In the middle of the week, we took some time off and among other places we visited the centre of our Lay Dominicans who are quite many in this part of the Cameroons. They have a very close connection with the Nuns who actually were instrumental in their "birth" in this

country and they continue to support them with their prayers.

It was indeed a joy to have been together for those few days; some meeting even for the first time. We pray and ask your prayers that the resolutions taken will be worked on as years come and go. Once again we thank our Bambui Sisters for making our stay with them such a pleasant experience, spoiling us with all sorts of delicious traditional dishes as well as fruits from their own farm. Above all we thank them for their LOVE. God bless them.

The day of departure came and we all left to our various destinations.

Original: English

Testimony of the sisters who came from Lejona (Bilbao-Spain) to the community of Salamanca

Some years ago our community of Lejona began to think about its future and tried to analyse the feasibility of being able to live Dominican life in our monastery. Even though common life, liturgy, observances, prayer and work could be carried out satisfactorily, the decrease in numbers, the increasing of age of the sisters and the lack of vocations forced us to look for suitable solutions.

We tried to solve this situation by asking for help from our federation of St. Dominic, we offered our monastery to be the Monastery of the Federation and we tried to promote vocations but we were not successful. Then we decided to begin to contact other communities with a view to a possible amalgamation.

This process of discernment was followed by the whole community with a lot of peace and fraternity, and of course with great pain. It is not easy to leave a house which has been built with a lot of sacrifice and love and to close a monastery with a long history of many centuries of praising the Lord and seeking holiness. In this arduous journey we have felt God's help and the protection of all the saints of our Order. We are convinced and we confess that although the homework has been the strength and the light came from on High.

After much reflection and searching and thinking about different monasteries, it seemed that the best place for us to continue our Dominican life was in the monastery of Salamanca.

Once we made the official petition for fusion the sisters of this monastery accepted our request affectionately opening the doors of their house. We got the necessary permission and on the first Sunday of October, 3rd of 2004, feast of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary we left Lejona and went to the monastery of Salamanca. On the way we stopped at Caleruega to hand over the keys of our house in the house of our father St. Dominic. There was a Solemn Mass and we took part in the procession with the parishioners of the village and we visited the monastery. After lunch we continued on our way to the community of Salamanca. The nuns of Salamanca accepted us lovingly and with understanding - opening not only the doors of their house but the doors of their hearts. From the beginning they showed their love with a warm and sisterly welcome. There were banners of welcome, songs and fraternal and effusive hugs.

October of this year, 2011, will be the seventh anniversary of our arrival to these Castilian lands and we continue to be very happy. Never at any moment have we regretted coming to this community because it is also ours.

Note of the sisters of Salamanca:

To tell the truth we must say that our sisters of Lejona have given us an edifying and heroic testimony. They have never tried to impose anything of theirs. They cooperate in the work of the house helping as much as they can. It is true that for us they are our sisters – very soon one of them was voted as Councillor, even she is the Vicar of the Prioress. We have tried to please them by accepting some of their customs, especially in the liturgy, we celebrate some of their saints and feasts which were dear to them. Harmony and Dominican fraternity reign among us as a great gift of God.

Original: Spanish

**Presentation of the new members of
the Commission**



*Sr. M. Josefa Strettiová, OP
Prague-Lysolaje
Region of Europa Utriusque*

Dear Sisters,

my name is Sr. M. Josefa. I was asked to introduce myself as a new member of the International Commission for a large area of Europe. The region consists of twenty monasteries in twelve countries.

I was born in 1970 to a half-Christian home. My mum used to go to Church with us children but my dad rarely went with us. We prayed for him for years and were witnesses of the most wonderful change in our family when he discovered the gift of faith. Both my parents are now active members of a Church movement, in which one of my sisters is a celibate member. My other sister is married.

I grew up in the communistic Czechoslovakia. During my university studies a political change took place. We believe it was on the intercession of St. Agnes of Bohemia, canonized at that time, that God freed our land from the yoke of communism. The change was relatively peaceful. The “Velvet revolution” was initiated by students. During those frenetic days some of us stayed at the faculty and prayed for a peaceful outcome of the revolution. I experienced again the importance of prayer – at a time when I was searching for my place in the Church.

In a prayer group I discovered the joy of being saved and wanted to share the faith with others. Soon I saw that my gift was not for evangelization, but to give myself totally to God in a life of prayer. Once I saw an invitation to religious life: “Do you want to consecrate your life for the salvation of souls according to the example of St. Dominic?” These words resonated deeply with the desire in my heart. So I joined the community of Dominican Nuns in Prague-Lysolaje when I was twenty.

Now I am forty one and I see that I have been learning all the time in the Order. I studied theology to help me in my religious life and in my work of translating from English. I kept learning as I served the community as a chantress, sacristan, sub-prioress and by cooking and sewing. Now I am learning how to be weak in result of a serious illness. I hope to go on learning in the International Commission. And as a community we are now learning how to build a new monastery, since the house in which we live is a temporary arrangement. Please pray for us.

Original: English



Sr. Isabelle Lepoutre, OP
Estavayer-le-Lac
(Switzerland)
Region of France

After a Canadian and a Finn, the nun representing region France... is French! I entered the Order in the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial, in France (Paray-le-Monial is the town where the Sacred-Heart of Jesus appeared to St Margaret-Mary). I lived there for 8 years and I now belong to the monastery of Estavayer-le-Lac in French-speaking Switzerland where I have been for 13 years.

I have two major study interests: one is the Bible, especially the narratives of the Old Testament. I look at these men and women who lived so long ago, at their lives which, like ours, are complicated and messed up by sin and I try to see how God works in their lives. And then I look at my life, the lives of those around me, and I try to find God's presence in today's world, I try to figure out how He is working nowadays. A French Bible scholar wrote: "they were like us and God loved them". We could say as well: "We are like them and God loves us".

My other interest is the history of the Order. Unfortunately, I haven't had too much time to indulge in it these past years, but hopefully I'll do some catching up with 2016 coming up! Not only will it be the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Order, but

also the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the first sisters in the little town of Estavayer. Since 1316, through thick and thin, our community has unceasingly kept its office of praise and prayer in these walls. There have been great moments, and also more difficult ones, such as a great epidemic of plague which ravaged the community in the 16th century. Only two or three sisters survived. The situation is not quite that desperate currently since we are still 14 nuns living on the premises, but we pray them often these days of religious uncertainty and ask them to watch over our community.

Original: French



Sr. Anna Marie Pierre, OP
Elmira, NY
Region of North America

My name is Sr. Anna Marie Pierre, OP. I represent the region of North America (USA, Canada, Trinidad). At the request of Fr. Bruno Cadoré, the Master of the Order, I have joyfully (and with some trembling and trepidation!) accepted the appointment as member of the International Commission of Nuns of the Order (ICNOP) for a six year period. I was quite surprised that, firstly, I was nominated by the nuns and secondly, appointed as a member of the ICNOP. I am thankful for the confidence and trust the nuns have shown in me. I see my task as a member of the Commission to be at the service of the monasteries, and to work with Fr Brian Pierce, OP toward fostering an even greater unity among us. I am also at the service of the Master and a link between him and the nuns of the region I represent.

I was born the eighth of ten children, seven girls and three boys to Catholic parents in Trinidad, W.I. At the age of seventeen, I entered a congregation of teaching and nursing sisters in Barbados, W.I. I had just completed my novitiate and was due to make my first profession, when the missionary sisters from the U.S.A. and Germany decided to leave the Caribbean and return to their homeland. The

option presented to me was to make first vows and follow the congregation to the USA. I sought the counsel of our then Archbishop, Anthony Pantin, a close friend of my family who advised me to return home instead of accompanying the sisters to the U.S.A.

I was disappointed but obediently, I returned home to my family. Soon I was once again immersed in my studies of Accounting and Computer Science. Sometime later, however, I began studying philosophy. I believe that the Lord used my love for the discipline of philosophy to once again allure me and speak to my heart. After four years of Philosophy I answered God's call to the monastic life. With great joy I entered the only Dominican Monastery in the Caribbean which was founded in Trinidad in 1875 by the nuns who were expelled from Venezuela during the religious persecution. Right after my first profession I was sent to our Regional Seminary to study for a degree in Theology because the monastery did not have the personnel to provide the formation they believed adequate and necessary for me prior to making my Solemn vows. For this I remain grateful.

In March 2005, I was given the opportunity to transfer to the monastery of Mary the Queen, Elmira, NY. and subsequently transfiliated. I have since served the community as bursar for three years and at present I am the novice mistress. I am also currently on the four-member team of our Association's Standing Committee for Formation and the Co-ordinator of Ongoing Formation. I thank God for yet another opportunity to be of service to my sisters and the Order and trust that I can continue to rely on their prayerful support.

Original: English



Sr. Margarita Martinez , OP
Guadalajara Jal. Mexico
Federation Saint Mary of
Guadalupe (Mexico)

Dear sisters of Monialibus and readers of this bulletin, with great joy the Lord lets us know that we are His beloved children. Here I

introduce myself as a new member of the International Commission of Nuns representing my country Mexico and my Federation Saint Mary of Guadalupe.

My name is Sr Margarita Martínez Canales. I was born in May in 1967 in the City of Guadalajara Jal. Mexico. I entered the Order on the 8th of August in 1983. I made my first Profession on the 19th of May in 1985 and my Solemn Profession in May in 1990.

I was in the Community of Prouilhe in France from 2007 to 2010. My experience in Prouilhe was spiritually very rich. The sisters were very kind. They always showed me their charity, understanding and love. It is a fraternal, united and observant community. I take the advantage of this information media to thank them all for what I learnt from them. May God continue to bless them. I wish that more sisters could live this Dominican experience.

United in God and in Our Father St. Dominic.

Original: Spanish



Sr. Immaculate Serrano,OP
La Solana (Ciudad Real)
Federation Our Lady of the
Rosary (Spain)

As a new member of the International Commission of Nuns representing the Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary (Spain), I thank God and my sisters for the possibility offered to me to know and to live the Order from other points of views and situations. For a contemplative nun to be able to live such an experience is really a gift and a grace. The Order of Preachers does not know limits in space or time and the mission of preaching is fascinating and modern although it has its origin based on the command that Jesus gave to his first disciples: "Go everywhere and proclaim the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9,2)

But one of the main pillars of preaching is prayer. "Contemplare et contemplare aliis tradere", means to be filled with God and share

the fruits with others and our lives should radiate Christ in all senses.

Our life can be prayer if our prayer becomes life. In these moments of the history we are living the most important thing for me is to look after my most valuable treasure: my vocation as a Dominican contemplative nun for the mission from grace and mercy as Saint Dominic taught us. The big duty of the Order and of each Dominican is to preach and to live engaged with preaching with the same zeal and passion as saint Dominic used to do. Everything we do it should proclaim the Word of God.

Never quench in us the fire of God's grace which urges us preach, welcome or unwelcome, as fruit of our contemplation

Original: Spanish

Retreat of the dominican Monasteries of Ecuador

Dear sisters and brothers in our Father St. Dominic:

The communities of the monasteries of Ecuador have lived a retreat from the 13th to the 21st of January. Our brothers Fr. Brian Pierce, OP and Fr. Pablo Condrac, OP. (Prior of the Monastery of friars in Mendoza – Argentina and Secretary of the Provincial Prior of Argentina) gave us the talks.

The place chosen by God for our retreat was the House of Spirituality of the Immaculate of our Franciscan Sisters. We commenced this retreat with Vespers. Then we shared our dinner with our sisters and of course the friars. After dinner we met in the Conference room and Fr. Brian Pierce welcomed us and invited us to live this retreat in a deep silence so as to be able to listen to God. He brought us greetings from the Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadoré. The Master asked a question which showed his interest in the nuns: "What are the nuns doing to participate in the mission of the Order?"

Thursday: We began with the Eucharist at 7:00. Fr. Brian with a total outpouring of the Holy Spirit overturned the vase which was in front of the lectern showing us that just as the

water flowed out from the vase in the same way grace pours over our souls.



At 9:00 am Fr. Brian began his talk. The importance was the approach and the recognition of the common elements for the manifestation of God in certain moments of the history of Salvation: Genesis (creation), the Annunciation and Pentecost. It is important to emphasize the emptiness and the Word uttered. At 12:45 pm we sang the midday prayer in the chapel then we had lunch and we went to have a rest. At 3:15 pm Fr. Pablo spoke to us about the Prologue of St. John under an engaging title: "Jesus, God 's tenderness, our hope" to summarize the mystery of "the Word was made flesh (Jn 1, 14)". He stated that God speaks a whisper in our interior and this Word resounds in our heart like a diapason.

Then we had a snack and at 5:30 pm we prayed the Rosary and Vespers. We used to have a light dinner to be well disposed for the following day. At 8:00 we joined together to do the walking meditation.

Fr. Brian who was a professional in this matter introduced us to this method of keeping ourselves in the presence of God throughout the whole day. Through our breathing we kept the rhythm of a calm night and we slowly began to walk breathing in, calling to our mind the sentences which had echoed during the day. We stopped three times to listen to the ECHO (the words or sentences) and then around a pool which was in the middle of the garden we sang the Salve to our Lady and O Lumen to our Father St. Dominic.

Friday: Fr. Brian in his talk explained the homily of Benedict XVI in the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the most outstanding of the document was: "THE WORD OF GOD ALONE CAN PROFOUNDLY CHANGE MAN'S HEART". He reflected on the message to the People of God of the Synod of Bishops about the Word of God, pointing out four main points: the voice of the Word (Revelation), Face (Jesus Christ), the House (Church) and the Roads (mission).

Then we listened to a part of the letter written by the Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadore at Advent: "God comes personally to dialogue with his people, and the delicate silence of a gentle breeze covers the world and opens the time of hope for a new creation. Everybody can dare to be born again; the world can be renewed".

In the afternoon Fr. Pablo talked about the identity of Jesus, how we can discover our own identity looking at Him. Like St. Paul traveling to Damascus asked Jesus "who are you, Lord?" in the same way the world asks us nowadays what should I do so as people can see the Word living in me? Simply in the encounter with the other the Word which lives in us is made flesh. We finished the day with the walking meditation.

Saturday: Fr. Brian in his talk presented the figure of St. Mary Magdalene immersed in the darkness of night. From here the next experience comes out: Faith is the bird which feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark. Master Elkhart writes: "Be still, do not run away from the emptiness". The Word of God is found in poverty of spirit and good works are made through faith. The presence of the Virgin Mary co-operates with her answer in the Annunciation: HERE I AM.

We were waiting to hear what God was going to communicate through Fr Pablo. This time he spoke about an exuberant topic: the tenderness of Jesus. He described the structure of a rose; but... surprise!!! he took out a rose from the drawer and he said that despite all the descriptions we could made of a rose there is not comparison when we contemplate it. The message was the beautiful things with small

letter lead us to the BEAUTY WITH CAPITAL LETTERS. All of us were delighted with this nice detail. He added that his tenderness is a sign of an inner force which poured out from a heart that knows how to love and to receive love without fear. Jesus shows his tenderness through gestures with tax collectors, sinners, sick people, women. He emphasised how important it is that God watches the past under the light of the present while we watch the present under the light of the past.

Sunday: This day of the Lord we gathered round the Bread of Life: the table of the Word and the table of the body of Christ. After living this meeting with Jesus in Eucharist we attended Fr. Brian's talk. He talked to us about the Lectio in community; he introduced us to a method of studying during the week the Word to be proclaimed on Sunday. This way of carrying the echo in our hearts and of sharing bread with our sisters was promising. He gave us the example of the miracle of the loaves and the presence of Mary Magdalene when she pours the ointment on Jesus's feet. Fr. Brian invited us to choose the poor, to be generous and to encourage the others when they need it.

A sign of their affection was to see Fr. Brian and Fr. Pablo with their aprons at the door of the refectory to serve the meals. They had a special menu, typical of the land. It was a very good service. With a great joy in our hearts we finished giving thanks to God and singing for this marvellous gift of fraternity.

Fr. Pablo in this talk pointed out the topic of HOPE based on the figure of Abraham when he negotiated with God about the number of the righteous and also on the parable of the merciful father. The message he left was that we should leave God to have the last word in all circumstances because there is nothing in history that cannot be changed by God.

Monday: Fr. Brian in his talk underlined the importance of living the present moment and he reminded us of a Carmelite friar's maxim: "I keep in His presence with a simple attention and with a loving glance at Him". Then a question arises: Where are you? and the Lord answers: "HERE I AM". To conclude: if

your mind is not with your body then you miss the appointment with life.

Fr. Pablo talked about hope as a virtue which gives us attraction, happiness and gift and makes us happy, strong and persevering. Based on the parable of the ten bridesmaids he told us we should be persistent and put oil in our lamps each day being conscious that the important thing is not to have more but to be more.

Tuesday: Enjoying of a day full of light our day's journey went on in its usual pace and we get ready for Fr. Brian's talk. He talked about the Samaritan woman. The most relevant thing was that Jesus needs is that our bucket (heart) be empty so that he can enter and live inside us, he wants us to participate in a new birth entering into our inner unity. He made a question in reference to this topic and related to our common life: is the door of our monastery open?

In the afternoon Pablo went on with the matter of Hope, this time he explained the parable of the sower where the seed is the queen of the parable, that is, the sower sows the seeds without looking where it falls, he just sows. He teaches us we should be more generous with the seed of hope. This virtue makes our communities places of the Beatitudes as we are called to be epiphany, plenitude for our sisters.

Wednesday: As everything has its beginning and its end we were near the conclusion of the retreat. Fr. Brian celebrated the Eucharist and all of us were deeply moved for all the graces received during these days. So we received the last talk which was focused on the presence of God in the emptiness of the community, he read the text Acts 6, 1-7. He mentioned the importance of the way of Dominican Government round the decisions we make in the community, it is so important to create an emptiness and let the Word of God be manifested among us for the action of God is manifested in each member of the community and not only in one person.

In the afternoon Fr. Pablo talked about fraternity. He used the psalm 132 to explain the happiness we should feel for being united. Two points: esteem and the responsibility lead me to consider my sister as a gift of God for me

although at the same time we live tense moments but this is a sign of growth. Crisis is an opportunity. He talked about the fraternal correction and he was very practical. He explained what brotherly correction was not. For this he showed an axe which meant the secret wish of revenge. He also wrote on toilet paper which he called the memorial of offences. True fraternal correction is to welcome and be a person with the doors open. Suddenly a big heart came out from his heart and later small colourful hearts which meant the acts of love we do to the others.

In the afternoon we shared our last meeting with Fr. Brian. He treated Dominican topics focused on the reality of our monasteries. Some commitments were established although the task now is to carry them out in our communities.

Thursday: We celebrated the closing Eucharist. We trust we will give share in our communities daily all the things God stamped in our souls during this time. At breakfast we sang a song for our brothers titled A KISS AND A FLOWER as farewell. Fr. Brian left in the morning and Fr. Pablo gave us another talk. The topic was that the announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven is the heart of preaching. This leads to a question: Whom do we invite to our table? Conversion is very important for our inner selves to be healed. We should learn to live with our hurts. This encounter with the Lord finished with the great gift of being community. It was an unforgettable experience for us. We were gathered together for a particular mission which is to love and be loved with the tenderness of Jesus.

Sr Mary of Carmen Mancila, OP –
Monastery of the Holy Family, Ecuador.

Original: Spanish

Dominican Novena Year of ***PREACHING***

When I was doing a bit of sharing to Sr. Mary Augustine, (our ICN delegate), Sister asked me to "write it down" to share also with

our sisters who will read *Monialibus*. The following is my humble attempt to be a writer.

I was thinking that the months of January and February had already made this a special year of Preaching for our community. January 2nd to 9th we had our retreat with Fr. Max Gatela, OP. Father's theme was "Imaging the Trinity" - - - a retreat we cannot easily forget. A daily reality! Persons of the Trinity are each AFOR the others, not for self.

February 7th was the day scheduled for a short visit from our Reverend Father Master, Fr. Bruno Cadore, OP. Father Bruno with his Filipino Socius, Fr. Larry Singian, OP, joined our Vespers, then had a dialogue with us in Chapter hall before taking supper with us in the community room. We were delighted to meet our Father Master in person and it was truly a memorable visit of a loving and affectionate Father with his daughters.

Fr. Brian Pierce, OP had been invited to give a week of lectures at the Asia-Pacific Dominican Formators Conference being held at Caleruega, Philippines during the months of February and March. So our dear Father Promoter used the opportunity to also visit our two Philippine monasteries at Bocaue and Cainta. He spent one week with the two communities "combined". Father had planned to give us lectures on *Lectio Divina*, using two documents as his basis. First in Bocaue, the "Final Message from the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church". Father told that this Synod was "our" (Dominican) Synod, for Preachers. Father came to us directly from Cuba and was very tired from 48 hours of travelling, to arrive in Manila on February 19. Having passed several time zones, Fr. Brian was no longer sure of the day or time of day. Six of our Cainta Sisters also arrived and on the 20th the wonderful lectures began! There were three lectures in Bocaue, with a free day on the 22nd for the solemn profession of our Sister Mary John.

Our Bishop Jose Oliveros, D.D., was the main celebrant; Fr. Brian gave a beautiful homily and three diocesan priests also concelebrated. Sr. Mary John's parents, relatives

and many friends graced the day and it was a wonderful day of celebration. Our caterer friends prepared a very nice dinner for the Bishop and guests on the outside and later for the Sisters in the community room, complete with decorations. Fr. Brian joined the Bishop and priests on the outside and then enhanced our celebration on the inside for awhile. We learned "how to" celebrate with a JOYFUL FRIAR!

The morning of February 23rd we had our last Bocaue lecture. After lunch our six Cainta Sisters and six Bocaue Sisters with Fr. Brian proceeded to Cainta - - - a drive of about two hours.

The lectures in Cainta were based on the document "THE PREACHING MINISTRY, An Introduction to the Acts of the General Chapter of Rome; Preaching and the sign of Identity of the Order." Needless to say, the Nuns of the Philippines are most grateful for Fr. Brian's "promotion" of our spiritual life and were sorry to have to bid him farewell. Now we pray to be able to assimilate and use the great graces proffered to us.

So much for January and February. The Asia-Pacific Dominican Formators Conference was held during the months of February and March. Our monastery was on the schedule at the end of the conference. We were privileged to have 24 participants for lunch on March 29th, as the group would have to pass Bocaue on their way to our Dominican Brothers Novitiate in Manaog, Pangasinan and then on to Baguio, a cool mountain resort area, for a few days of leisure after two months of hard work, and before returning to their homes and formator duties.

March 29, 2011----We came together!

Our Bishop had given permission for the visitors entry into our enclosure. We were people of a variety of colors and sizes, but ALL members of the one family of our Father Dominic! There were 11 Fathers, 1 Cooperator Brother, 12 Apostolic Sisters and we 16 Nuns. The experience was one of wonder and delight, in a small corner of a small

country and only a small space of time, from 10AM until 1:30PM. English was our language, with different “accents” and not the native language of anyone. We had a strong feeling of bonding among us. As our Sister Sesilia, from Indonesia remarked: “Many graces from God are coming down on this group.” We could say, “Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.” (Mt. 8:20). I find that a quotation from Bede Griffiths, OSB (recommended reading by Fr. Brian) expresses well what we were experiencing: “Behind all words and gestures, behind all thoughts and feelings, there is an inner center of prayer where we can meet one another in the presence of God. It is this inner center which is the real source of all life and activity and of all love.” (The Golden String by Bede Griffiths, O.S.B.)

Such a warm family reunion! There were no foreigners or strangers, only VERY JOYFUL Brothers and Sisters, where the God in each of us touched the God in the other. Nine countries were represented: India, Indonesia, Korea, Myanmar (Burma), Nigeria, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Viet Nam and Philippines. In that short period of time, we could realize that our true “citizenship is in heaven!”

As our 24 “newly discovered” Brothers and Sisters were passing through our choir to return to their bus, we all paused and rejoiced to sing the Salve Regina together, as a farewell to each other.

Though Father Brian told us that each of us is “vibrating with the Word”; (we were spoken into existence by the Word. The Word unites us to God, etc.), I think English words are not sufficient to describe our family reunion with so many nations. May Jesus Christ, THE WORD, be praised!

While we are thanking the dear Lord and our Father Dominic for this brief encounter, I am wondering what plans are in the mind of God for the rest of this year of Grace!

Sister Mary Elizabeth, OP
Queen of Angels Monastery
Bocaué, Philippines
Original: English

The Master of the Order invited the Dominican nuns of Spain look towards the future

From the 30th of April to the 1st of May 2011 the Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadore, OP, met about 90 Dominican nuns from the three Federations of Spain to exchange impressions about the future of contemplative life in the above mentioned country.



The meeting was held in the Monastery of friars the Vedat of Torrente. The Prioresses of all Dominican monasteries of Spain and the three Federal Councils which belong to the three provinces took part in this meeting: the Federation of St. Dominic (Province of Spain), the Federation of our Lady of the Rosary (Province of Andalusia) and the Federation of the Immaculate (Province of Aragon).

The aim of the meeting was to gather together the nuns of the three Federations “to look at the future” and exchange impressions about a possible re-arrangement among the monasteries because of the advanced age of many of the nuns and the lack of vocations for contemplative life.

In his first meeting with the Spanish nuns, the Master of the Order reminded them of the importance of preparing together the future of the mission of the Order. Among several topics Fr. Bruno pointed out prayer as the celebration of the mystery of the presence of God and the gift of His grace. In the same way the importance of study was discussed making reference to the necessity of “putting the

intelligence at the same level as the heart and *vice versa*".

Another topic explained was the celebration of the liturgy. About this aspect the Master pointed out that "to celebrate the liturgy prepares us for common life and *vice versa*, for this reason common life is a way of preaching". "We preach because in our common life we hope that the Lord comes" he stated. Fr. Bruno, in this sense, reminded us that "we don't live a contemplative life in general, but we live our contemplative life in the Order so that the Word may bear fruit and be preached".

On the vocational matter the Master of the Order emphasized that we should not seek to preserve monasteries and communities in the sense that "vocations are not searched for but welcomed".

"A company searches for personnel but in Dominican life we welcome, under the grace, the brothers and sisters whom the Lord sends". The Master warned about the temptation of looking for vocations to keep a Monastery open, "if we do that -he explained- then we act like the world".

During these two days of the meeting the topic of autonomy arose. On this point the Master of the Order said that "the basis of autonomy is Obedience". He pointed out that we are not autonomous like in the world where each person defends herself, our autonomy is different. It consists of "receiving our life as preachers bound to the mission of the Order".

Fr. Bruno encouraged the nuns to welcome the laity and prayer groups that go to the monasteries. We should let them use our assembly rooms. He also encouraged us to look for a way of having a commitment in the apostolic work of the Order from the enclosure, this means that we do not need to leave the monastery to participate in the apostolic work of the Order.

In our work in groups it was spoke about initial and permanent formation of the nuns. On this matter Fr. Bruno exhorted the nuns of the three Federations to organize courses for formation where all the monasteries of Spain could be involved.

Finally, four commissions were formed to work on the analysed topics at the interfederal level. Each commission is formed by two nuns from each Federation.

The Master of the Order said that if the work of the commissions makes sufficient progress during this year, then he hopes to meet the nuns of Spain again in 2012.

Original: Spanish

The Master of the Order meets with Italian nuns in Rome

About 30 prioresses, novice mistresses and monastery syndics gathered in Rome from May 11-12 with The Master of the Order to discuss the present situation of the Italian monasteries and to reflect on the future together. There are 30 monasteries in Italy, with a number of them dealing with difficult situations, due to the lack of vocations and the increasing age of the sisters.

Fr Bruno encouraged the nuns to look toward the future with hope, a hope rooted in the Order's mission of preaching and evangelization. "We are to share the Word of God with those who come to us," he said, "for this is precisely the mission of the Order. You are like mothers of the preaching mission of the Order. And for this to happen," he said, "the nuns must let the Word of God circulate among themselves" ("Dovete fare circolare la Parola di Dio tra di voi"). Fr Bruno encouraged the nuns to strengthen their common life and to celebrate the beauty of their liturgy as an important dimension to their preaching mission. The Master asked the nuns this question: "How can we witness as a community to the resurrection of Christ in a world marked by individualism? How can we be a community that welcomes others as brothers and sisters"?

The nuns, in turn, asked fr Bruno to give them courage and strength in these difficult times. "We also ask you to encourage the brothers to believe in us and to collaborate more closely with us," they asked. "We want the Order to help keep the dream alive in us. Perhaps brothers sisters and nuns could work together in vocational outreach"

Two commissions were formed at the end of the two-day meeting, each composed of five nuns from different monasteries. One commission will focus on strengthening initial and permanent formation among the monasteries, and the other will study the situation of elderly sisters and increasingly fragile monasteries in Italy, in search of possible proposals to be presented to the Master. Fr Bruno noted that difficult decisions will need to be made in the coming years, but that our common humanity, and the joy of our mission of preaching must remain the central focus. "Our mission," he said, "is to tell the world that God is interested in our humanity, and that we were created for joy. To choose well [in these coming years] we must first choose to be human".

fr Brian Pierce, op
Original: English

American and Canadian Novice Mistresses meeting

The Novice Mistresses of the Association of the Dominican Monasteries of the U.S.A. held their annual meeting on, May 17-26, 2011 at the Monastery of the Infant Jesus, Lufkin Texas. Attending were: Sr Mary Catharine – Summit, NJ. Sr Anna Marie – Elmira, NY. Sr Mary Veronica – Lancaster, PA. Sr Maria Guadalupe – Lufkin, TX. Sr. Mary Rose – Farmington Hills, MI. Sr Mary Magdalen – Squamish, BC. Sr Mary of the Precious Blood – Marbury, AL. Sr Maria Pia – Bronx, NY. Sr Mary of the Sacred Heart – Menlo Park, CA.



Fr. Dominic Izzo, OP the Friar Consultant for the Association, was also present for the latter half of the meeting. He contributed very

valuable insights during the lectures and also throughout our many discussion periods.

Two speakers were invited to address the group. Sr. Mary Angela, OP, of Nashville, TN. and Sr. Mary Dominica, OP, of Springfield, IL.

Sr. Mary Angela, OP, is the Novice Mistress of the Nashville Dominicans, Her first topic was *Asceticism, Silence, Solitude and Sexuality in Formation*. She skillfully drew from documents such as *Lumen Gentium, Vita Consecrata*, Pope Benedict's reflection in his book *Light of the World*, Pope Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio*, Pope John Paul II in *Redemptionis Donum* and *Muliers Dignitatem* to share her experience of many years and her insights of the strengths and weaknesses of the modern young women of today who eagerly seek to consecrate themselves to the Lord and to follow in the Dominican way of life.

In her second topic, *The Formator as Team Member*, Sr. Mary Angela stressed the importance of the decisive character of the role of teachers for the success of the work of formation. Some of the issues she addressed were: a) Responsibility of the Formators b) What Formators need and c) Their role as collaborator with Formation personnel as well as Community Leaders.

At the end of the first week's session we had a day of retreat that began with a reflection by Sister Mary John, OP the Prioress of the Lufkin community and the President of the Association of the Dominican Nuns of the Order for the USA /North America. Sister spoke very beautifully on the theme "Law and Love", with emphasis on the final end of law; happiness and its concern with the common good. Quoting our brother St. Thomas, she opined, *love is effectively willing the good of the other. However in this life we will not obey perfectly nor achieve perfect love, and so we have the gift of forgiveness.*

Our second speaker, Sr. Mary Dominica Brennan, a canon lawyer and member of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, gave an interesting introduction to Canon Law, showing how it is based on theological principles. It is intended for all peoples, all times and cultures, and covers every aspect of life, and so has very little detail. Because it is so

extensive, it requires an economy of words and so every word is important and has been chosen carefully. It is also essential to notice the placement of each canon, as that will indicate the significance of each section. Canon law is quite unlike American civil law and must be understood differently. Sister explained how Canon Law can benefit and protect religious, while at the same time maintaining that every 'right' implies an equal "obligation".

The afternoon periods were set aside for informal discussions. These were very fruitful times when we highlighted problems and concerns, sought clarifications and shared ideas and suggestions with each other. Listening to the experiences of other novice mistresses were of tremendous benefit to us all.

Our days of study and consultation were made possible and delightful through the warm hospitality, prayerful spirit and loving care of the nuns of the Lufkin community who made every effort to provide all that enhanced our stay with them such as the lively concert provided by the community which included beautiful Vietnamese, African, Mexican and Texan dances together with renditions of their theme song of Texas, their proud historical recalls of "everything Texas and the very entertaining *Cowboy/theologian* of Texas to mark the end of a wonderful two weeks experience. Our sincere thank you and gratitude to all.

Original: English

Chronicle of the 10th Elective Federal Assembly - Federation our Lady of the Rosary - Betica - Spain

Dear Sisters: The editor of *Monialibus* asked me to write a report for our bulletin *Monialibus* and I take this opportunity to greet the sisters of all the monasteries throughout the world and wish all of you a happy feast of our Holy Father Dominic full of the grace of preaching, and the joy of belonging to the Order.

The Federation met last June from the 9th to the 14th, to celebrate the Tenth Federal Elective Assembly, around the feast of

Pentecost, the day we had the election of the new government of the Federation. The Assembly was held in our Federal Monastery, St. Mary of Grace in Cordoba, Spain. In our federation we are 22 monasteries, and only one could not attend because the sisters are very old and cannot travel. The total number of sisters who went to Cordoba was 43.

The Assembly began with the work in commissions. All the monasteries had sent proposals for the work in the Assembly. Based on these proposals four working commissions were formed and all the sisters were assigned to them. We spent the two first days working in groups. We discussed the proposals of the monasteries and we tried to reach points of agreement to develop a working document to be presented to the Assembly for approval. In addition the commissions made their own proposals which also had to be discussed at the Plenary Assembly.

On the eve of Pentecost, the outgoing Federal Mother, Sr. Josefina Morales Pulido, presented her report to the Assembly and in the afternoon we had a symposium on the profile of the future Federal Mother and on the most significant problems in the Federation.

We celebrated the day of Pentecost with great solemnity. Early in the day we celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit to invoke the enlightenment of the Lord upon the entire Assembly and so we had success in the elections. After the Mass and breakfast we began the work on electing our new Federal. By noon Sr Mary Rafaela of Jesus Martinez Catena,



OP from the Monastery of the Immaculate Conception of Jaen was elected as Federal Mother. The one who was elected was not present, and therefore had to go to Cordoba - so the work was interrupted until her arrival early in the afternoon.

When the new Federal Mother arrived, all the nuns came to the choir to be present for her taking the oath of her new office and then all the sisters expressed our obedience by making the *venia*, a gesture so characteristic of our Order and so moving.

And though it was Sunday and a Feast Day, and we had to continue the work of electing the Federation Council. The whole afternoon was spent on these issues until the new government of the Federation was completed.

For the remaining two days we decided to take a more intense pace of work so that there would not be anything left unfinished. All documents of the commissions had to be submitted and the necessary changes approved. This Assembly undertook a review our Constitutions and Federal Directory, which was a very important but a complicated task. We were very proud of our work.

Thanks be to God we had time to work well on all the documents. The participation of the sisters was very positive and we experienced the richness of Dominican democracy and the verses of Psalm 132: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! I must say that every day the liturgy was celebrated with great care, with the participation of all the sisters of the various monasteries as organists and singers, which made the liturgical celebrations very solemn.

At night we had recreation and we shared fraternal moments while walking through the large gardens which belong to the federal house, with great views towards the outskirts of Cordoba and the Guadalquivir River. We were accompanied by a relatively cool climate, unusual in these latitudes, which can be quite hot. This helped so that fatigue did not appear until the last day.

The sisters from the nearby monasteries left the same day 14th in the afternoon, but not before taking a family photo. The remainder of the sisters returned to our communities on the 15th in the morning, to transmit everything we had lived there.

For some of the sisters it was the first time we had attended a Federal Assembly and we must say that it was a very enriching experience and we thank God for the way that our monasteries have journeyed as a Federation which facilitates mutual understanding, the richness found in each sister and each monastery and the road ahead is easier to travel,

knowing that there are sisters who share the same struggles and projects.

Faternally from the Monastery of Santa Ana, Murcia – Spain
Sr Immaculata of the Cross, OP

Original: Spanish

Open Forum

At the last meeting of the CIM it was decided that in this issue in the section "Open Forum" it would be included the topic of 2012, as a preparation for the Dominican Jubilee: "The nuns and preaching." Here it is a beautiful history written by Fr. Brian and for the issues of next year, I invite you to comment, recount experiences, propose ideas ... whatever you can think about the topic.

Nuns preach, too – in unexpected ways

As I travel around the world, visiting the nuns in the Order's almost 240 monasteries, I am frequently asked: "How can cloistered, contemplative nuns belong to an Order of Preachers? Do the nuns preach?" I usually smile, ask the person if he or she has a few minutes, and then I pull from my bag of stories one or two examples of how I have seen the nuns preach. Their preaching is a marvelous witness to the spirit of St. Dominic alive among us today. Allow me to share just one of the more beautiful communal preachings that I have had the privilege of discovering during the past few years.

The nuns from the monastery in Krakow, Poland with the encouragement of the Polish provincial, fr Henryk Jakubiec (who told them that they were too many and that it was time for a new foundation), made the decision to found a new monastery in the city of Vilnius (or *Vilna*, which was then part of Poland, and today the capital of Lithuania). On July 11, 1938 the eight nuns (two of whom were originally from Vilnius) moved into their new convent, dedicated to St. Joseph. The new foundation was blessed the following day by Archbishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski.

The nuns quickly began to draw up architectural plans for their new monastery and church, but the beginning of WWII stopped everything. On September 17, 1939 The Red Army occupied Vilnius, annexing it to the Soviet Union less than a year later. For a time the nuns were still able to live a fairly normal religious life, even after the monastery was nationalized. But things got worse.

In June 1941 Vilnius was occupied by the Nazis. Becoming aware of the danger that many citizens of the Jewish ghetto were facing, the sisters began to reach out to help them. It was Sr. Bertranda (Anna Borkowska), the prioress of the monastery at the time, who first proposed the idea of hiding Jews in the monastery. Though it seems that not all of the sisters were in agreement with the plan, once the killing of the Jews began, the community decided to open the monastery to a group of 17 members of illegal Jewish underground movements. Despite the enormous difference between the two groups, very close bonds were formed between the contemplative Dominican nuns and the secular Jews. The Jews found a safe haven behind the convent's walls, while helping the nuns with the work in the fields. They even called the prioress of the monastery "Ima" ("Mother" in Hebrew).

It was during this time in the monastery that Abba Kovner, a leader of the Hashomer Hazair Zionist movement in Vilnius, wrote the famous call to resistance. Aware that the Nazis were implementing a systematic plan to murder all the Jews of Europe, Kovner began to organize a resistance movement. Years later he stated that the ideas for the ghetto rebellion were formed during his time in the monastery: "Hitler is scheming to annihilate all of European Jewry... Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter!" The manifesto that Kovner read out to his friends on 31 December 1941 had been printed in the monastery.

By the end of December 1941 the Jewish refugees decided to leave the safety of the monastery and return to the ghetto, in order to establish the resistance movement. Sr. Bertranda tried to dissuade them from leaving, but was not successful. A few weeks after his

return to the ghetto, Abba Kovner was called to the ghetto's gate one day, only to find Sr. Bertranda waiting for him. She told Kovner that she wanted to join the Jews – in the ghetto: "God is in the ghetto," she said. Kovner, however, dissuaded her, telling her that there were other ways that the nuns could help.ⁱ

On March 23, 1942 three of the Sisters, returning from the city, where they had gone to confession with the Carmelite friars, suddenly noticed that some priests were being arrested. They quickly made their way back to the monastery and began to hide their things at the neighbors' houses. They did not stay at home that night. Each sister remained at the home of friends, while keeping in close contact with one another.ⁱⁱ In September 1943, as Nazi suspicions of her mounted, the Germans arrested Sr. Bertranda. Says Sr. Cecylia, "Sr. Bertranda paid a great price for her activism. She was imprisoned and tortured in the Nazi labor camp in Kowno." The convent was closed soon after, and the sisters dispersed. Most went into hiding, and after a time, a few returned to the monastery in Krakow.

In 2009 I had the privilege of visiting our nuns in both Vilnius and Krakow. The Vilnius monastery survived clandestinely for fifty years, only being reestablished in 1991, after the fall of the iron curtain. While in Vilnius I was blessed to have a long conversation with Sr. Teresa Mindziukiewicz, who entered the monastery secretly in the 1970's. It was Sr. Teresa who told me what it was like to be a Dominican nun *clandestinely* during the years of Communism. During those years, one of the nuns, Sr. Barnadetta Michrowska, was taken in by a Mrs. Krywko and her daughter. After both of them had died, the house was left as a gift to the nuns. This house (which came to be known among the nuns as "the house in the forest") was for many years the secret meeting place for the nuns. Says Sr. Teresa, "We came together every month or two in a house hidden deep in the forest. It was in that house that we gathered – secretly – to celebrate mass (whenever one of the Polish friars could visit us). It was in that same house that we made our professions, received our

spiritual training and had our community meetings. And then she added, smiling shyly, "I was even elected prioress in that house!" Sr. Teresa lived more than twenty years as a Dominican nun before ever living formally in a monastery!

After Vilnius, I was able to visit the monastery of Gródek, in Krakow for two days. One of the highlights of those two days was meeting Sr. Cecylia Roszak, the only living member of the original Vilnius foundation. At age 103 she is an icon of faithfulness and contemplative joy! It was she that first told me about hiding the Jews in the monastery in Vilnius. She told me that in order to protect their Jewish guests from being discovered by the Nazis, the nuns assigned each of them a communal chore and a Christian name! Though she did not say this, it is clear that the nuns risked their very own lives by opening the doors of their monastery as a sanctuary for their persecuted neighbors.

After awhile (and my many questions!), Sr. Cecylia began to tell me a most incredible story. After the Nazis closed the monastery in Vilnius, thus scattering the nuns to the four directions, Sr. Cecylia eventually returned to her monastery in Krakow. One day, several years later (she does not remember the exact year), the telephone rang in the monastery of Krakow. Sr. Cecylia was near the phone and picked it up. A man began to ask very vague questions about "some nuns who lived in Vilnius in the 1930's". He was very careful not to reveal anything personal (this was, of course, during the years of communist rule). He had called the monastery by chance, simply because the phrase "Klasztor SS Dominikanek" reminded him of the convent that he had taken refuge in some years before. He had no idea that the monastery in Krakow had any relationship to the "nuns who lived in Vilnius."

The more questions the man asked, the more curious Sr. Cecylia became. Finally, at one point, Sr. Cecylia asked, "Excuse me, could you tell me your name?" The man hesitated, and then said, "My name is Abba Kovner." Sr. Cecylia asked, "When you met those nuns in Vilnius, were you with your girlfriend?" She

told me that there was a long pause on the phone, and finally the man answered, "Yes," to which Sr. Cecylia replied, "Abba, this is Sr. Cecylia; I was living in the monastery in Vilnius when you lived with us!"

"He became very emotional," Sr. Cecylia recounted, and then he said to her: "Sister, I have been looking for a long time to make contact with someone from your community to say 'Thank You' for saving my life!" He went on to tell her that he was calling from Israel, where he had managed to emigrate after the uprising in Vilnius. They spoke for awhile, and before hanging up, Abba asked for the address of the monastery. Some weeks later a small box arrived from Israel, addressed to Sr. Cecylia. In it was a small crucifix, with "Jerusalem" inscribed at the base. Abba, who went on to become a very famous poet in Israel, later emigrated to the United States, where he died in 1987.

But in 1984, thanks to the efforts of Abba Kovner, Anna Borkowska (formerly Sister Bertranda, who left religious life in 1944) and the founding community of the Dominican monastery in Vilnius received a very great honor for their courageous witness of faith. Borkowska, who was 84 years old and living in Warsaw at the time, accepted, on behalf of the nuns, the medal and title of "Righteous among the Nations," the highest honor given by Israel and the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem to non-Jews who risked their lives in saving Jews during the Holocaust.

In gratitude, and as attribute to his friend, Sr. Bertranda (Anna Borkowska), Abba Kovner planted a tree in her honor on the Avenue of the Righteous on the Mount of Remembrance.

Kovner traveled to Warsaw to present Anna Borkowska with the medal. "Why do I deserve this honor?" asked Borkowska, to which Kovner answered: "You are Anna of the angels". And then he went on to explain: "During the days when angels hid their faces from us, this woman was for us Anna of the Angels. Not of angles that we invent in our hearts, but of angels that create our lives forever."

On my second day with the nuns in Krakow in August 2009, Sr. Cecylia showed me

her two treasures: the medal from Israel, recognizing her as one of “the righteous of the nations”, and the small bronze crucifix given to her from Kovner, “to thank you for saving my life”. I must say that as I bring this reflection to a close, my eyes fill with tears of gratitude. What a grace it has been for me to meet these seemingly unimportant nuns – my sisters in St. Dominic – who, though choosing to live a hidden life of prayer, knew that the gospel sometimes asks of us something that we do not expect. These sisters, in a way similar to our nuns in Burundi, in Africa, were asked to preach the gospel by opening their monastery to the poor and oppressed. They responded wholeheartedly, and the echo of their *holy preaching* resounds in our world today.

fr Brian J. Pierce, OP

Promoter General of the Nuns of the Orderⁱⁱⁱ

Original: English

sr. Dominka Sokolowska.

ⁱ Some of the historical details were gathered through the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem: “The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority,” 2010. See: http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/poland/borkowska.html

ⁱⁱ From interview with Sr Cecylia Roszak, OP, 2009.

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