

One Brother's' Renewal:

To Meet, To Pray, To Listen, To Dialogue, To Search, To Understand, Then To Preach

It was an extraordinary privilege to have been invited by the Master of the Order to participate as a guest in the General Chapter of Bogota in conformity with the *Acts* of the General Chapter of Krakow (#295). Others representing the Nuns, the Apostolic Sisters, the Dominican Laity, the Dominican Volunteers, and the International Dominican Youth Movement were also invited as guests.

In the preparations for the Chapter, the capitulars (Prior Provincials, General Vicars, and Delegates representing institutions directly under the jurisdiction of the Master) and all guests were appointed to six commissions. I was appointed to the Commission on the Apostolic Life where discussions occurred in three languages, i.e. English, French, and Spanish. As guests, we had the privilege of exercising full voice and vote in the work of the Commissions; in the Plenary Sessions; however, guests had voice but could not offer amendments or vote.

Though I spent only a few hours at the General Chapter of Providence, this was my first experience attending a full Chapter. The preparations for a worldwide General Chapter among brothers speaking many languages from many countries are several years in the making with the work increasing exponentially as time draws closer. I was impressed with the organizational details but more importantly by the fraternal regard that the General Curia, the General Secretariate and the brothers of the Convento of Santo Domingo of Bogota had for the capitulars, staff and guests. Their hospitality, patience, humor, care and concern for those who spoke languages other than Spanish was exceptional in every way. The Chapter website (www.dominicosbogota2007.org) provides excellent views of the Convent, the text of the rich homilies, liturgical celebrations and special events with the Dominican Family.

The detailed outcomes of the Chapter can be found in the *Acts* circulated earlier. New legislation was approved but the trend was to reflect on what has already been stated in the *Constitutions* and the *Acts* of recent Chapters and specifically how the universal mission of our Order can be brought to bear on the challenges of today's world through the lives of the whole Dominican Family and its ministries. Opportunities for preaching through new forms of encounter, collaboration, dialogue, sharing of resources and ultimately, risk-taking for the sake of the Gospel, were critically examined.

As a member of the Commission on the Apostolate Life, my horizons on the vitally important influence of our Order in our ever-expanding global world and the incredible gifts we bring to bear on evangelization through renewal, conversion, hope and healing, were dramatically broadened and deeply enriched. Four fundamental dimensions of our mission today, which provided the outline for the text on the Apostolic Life, included:

- 1. Preachers are first of all people of encounter and dialogue;*
- 2. Preachers are sent on mission to love the world, following Christ, whose presence they desire to reveal;*

3. *The preacher has the world as cloister; and*

4. *The preacher is a member of the Dominican Family*

Participating in the General Chapter of Bogota also provided me with a new understanding of how to prepare for the preaching moment and when it occurs in the life of the preacher. We were reminded of the time St. Dominic was anticipating an encounter with German pilgrims (Frachet, *Life of the Brethren*, II10) when he said: "*Let us kneel down and pray to understand them, so we may be able to speak their own language and thus preach! This helped me to understand that the preaching moment follows the time to listen, to dialogue, to pray, to search to understand the needs of others, then to preach!*"

I also especially encourage a careful reading of the Master's *Relatio* and to seriously consider how the needs and challenges in our Dominican life and ministry, in our communities and in the Province, can lead us through renewal and conversion in order to help us fulfill universal mission of our Order. Many of the issues and new challenges the Master presented in his *Relatio* found their way into the texts of the Commissions.

As you know fr. Dominique Renouard, O.P., Vicar of the Master, died during his sleep in the early hours of July 30. His unexpected death deeply affected the dynamic of the Chapter, yet in a positive way. His death called me to a deepened level of contemplation, renewal and conversion on the extraordinary gift, privilege and responsibilities I have as a cooperator brother living and working in the midst of brothers and sisters in service to the universal mission of our Order. Being made suddenly vulnerable knowing that the *Digitus Dei* was powerfully present in our midst, resulted in an experience of care and concern for one another - the principle gift that Dominic Renouard gave to all those who knew him. Truly, as son of St. Dominic, his life remains a model for all of us. May he rest forever in the presence of God!

My special thanks to the Master of the Order and the General Curia for inviting me to participate in this important event in our Order. An extraordinary appreciation is offered to fr. José Gabriel Mesa Angulo, OP, Prior Provincial of the Province of Colombia, the brothers of the Province and to the Prior and brothers of the Convento Santo Domingo for their exceptional fraternal care for the delegates.

fr. Ignatius Perkins, O.P.

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